OVER THE OLD ROUTE INTO EGYPT

GOING DOWN FROM JERUSALEM

THE NARRATIVE OF A SENTIMENTAL TRAVELLER

BY

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TO
THAT CONSTANT FRIEND
MARCELLUS MILLS GRAY
THIS BOOK IS MOST
HEARTILY DEDICATED

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GOING DOWN FROM JERUSALEM

GOING DOWN FROM JERUSALEM

I

THE SOUL OF THE COBBLER

WE entered Jerusalem from the north—he whom they called the younger *khawaja* and I—having ridden down from Damascus with a small caravan, camping by the way; and a mean black time it was, this last night of our riding, and late of it, too—cold and wind-swept from the northwest, and black dark and wet with a pelting rain of that sour winter. I recall no lights of the city, no warm invitation from afar to be housed, no passengers abroad on the roads, but remember the wind and thick night, the clatter of hoofs, the glum silence of those servants and companions, a loose rein and the splash and mud and weariness of late riding. Presently, however, we were well bestowed in a hostelry by the Jaffa Gate, and when the muleteers had fetched the bags from the dripping pack animals below, we extracted the carpets and tapestries of Damascus, with which we

travelled, having learned the wisdom of it; and in this simple way we transformed the cold chamber into a warm and familiar place, grateful to the eye and feet and spirit, like home. With a lusty fire buzzing in the little porcelain stove, and with the mud and sweat of travel washed off, and with a supper of savory things steaming on the table, and with the beloved Blue Rug and the Red Bokhara glowing in the lamplight, and with Aboosh, that admirable dragoman! already tricked out in the raiment of the town, now grinning no more a pride in his achievement upon our poor travelling than a vain interest in his bright cravat and the angle of his mustache—this withal, we looked back upon the rainy journey with satisfaction, recollecting it all in vast jollity, and thence turned with expanding enthusiasm to the prospect of sunnier riding southward beyond Beersheba and over the plains and sandy desert into Egypt by the ancient caravan route.

Thereupon we planned this new journey; and in the sunshine of the way (said we), we should find new delights of travel, and ease in its isolation from a swarming and distracting world.

To Hebron and to Beersheba, among the pastoral Bedouins to El Arish on the shore of the sea, and thence many sandy days to the Suez Canal at Kantara: a placid and companionable journey, riding thus in the grateful January weather. We were presently on the way toward these places. I

remember the rosy morning air, the sunlight, the blue distances and greening fields of our departure from Jerusalem—the olive-trees and stony barrens, the blithe patter of hoofs, the bells of the baggage mules, and dust of our small company on the white road beyond, the dwindling towers and walls of the sacred hills. I recall, too, the exhilaration of the hour: proceeding no more from an errand into the open, in expectation of mild adventure, than issuing upon the disappearance of all pitiable shrines and the spectacle of an ignorant adoration which had depressed our spirits.

We conceived the auguries favorable to a happy progress in strange places; and it pleased us in this way to make-believe—a grave pretence that omens, as once they had been, still were large with meaning to such as took the old road into Egypt. In a field beyond Bethlehem a new-born kid lay at the feet of a small shepherd of those hills, whereby the wonder of our followers was excited to an amazing garrulity, for no birth had ever before occurred at their passing; and a masterless dog of the city had attached herself to our adventure, which was a happy omen (they said), though, indeed, it presently appeared that she was but a friend of the white mule, and had come, not to join fortunes with us, but in the regular exercise of her devotion.

At the Jaffa Gate a ragged Moslem graybeard, afflicted, but held in holy regard by the pious because of an illumination exceeding wisdom, had lifted his

hands and muttered a vacant benediction, including us with all the thronging world; past the foot of the hill a band of Russian pilgrims, toiling toward the gate of their holy city, gave us for our beggarly greeting—worn souls!—an abundant blessing, besting us mightily in this wayside exchange; he that calls himself John the Baptist having come but yesterday from long wandering in the wilderness beyond Jordan—hairy, gaunt, bare-legged, and in rags—conveyed the Divine sanction from the shade of an olive-tree by the way, whence, when the sun was high (they said), he would into the city, uplifted and eloquent, to proclaim his message to a heedless generation.

We rode out in great humor with the time and undertaking, blessed by infidel and pilgrim, hermit and *fellah*, dusty travellers afoot and them that bestrode fine beasts; and this was a curious and heartening departure.

That night we lay at Hebron.

Here is a city of gentle situation, lying in a sunlit valley: a grape-land, fertile and well watered through these ages since the children of Israel first beheld it. It is a place of evil faith and monstrous reputation; the zeal of twenty thousand Mohammedans, grown restless, finds occasional vent in the murder of some wretched Jew or wandering native Christian, and is an abiding menace to all travellers not of Islam.

"Men," the missionary shouted from his threshold, "no tent where there is a roof! God bless you all!" with glowing heartiness; "come in. Made this house myself," he apologized, with a chuckle, "and it isn't finished. But never mind that; come right on in here and be at home. You *are* at home," cried he; and immediately gave over his kitchen to our cook, which made us guests, indeed, of his compassion, as we were glad to be.

He was a spare, eager young man, all aflash and twinkling with vital love of folk, and so abstracted with us and uneasy, because of a habit of preoccupation—though he rattled on with much charm and intelligence—that I fancied he was forever devising cunning schemes to lure the people to his faith. Here dwelt he, then, in discomfort and grave isolation, in much real peril—in poverty, doubtless, without hope of any gain—but was ingenuously proud of his employment.

"I tell you, men," he declared, in conviction so lively that I jumped and was amazed in the presence of it, "this work is its *own* reward!"

There had been a vast expenditure of reasonable love here—of money little enough, I think, so mean a sum that it mocked the wealth of the churches—but of the strength of one wise man its all; and I wondered concerning its visible return: not in total attendance, neither in day-school progress and behavior, but in the tale of captives taken from the hosts of Islam, by which the knight himself must

measure his own victory. This was no mean intention to make divisor and dividend of souls and cash, which may not by any gracious heart be done, nor was it a narrow and cynical curiosity, neglecting the ultimate return, but a simple traveller's wonder concerning the immediate effect of a rare conjunction of great purpose with an impeccable efficiency and a personality so engaging that the business of proselyting was here indulged above the law.

"One soul," the man answered, frankly.

There was no sigh, no complaint or hopelessness; there was a brief expectation of blame, perhaps, to arise from lay misunderstanding, but no readiness to resent it, as the missionary regarded me steadfastly.

"One soul?" I echoed.

"The Lord," said he, brushing the hair from his brow, "has given us—*just one soul!*"

I had not thought that in all Hebron one man had dared declare himself apostate; but the missionary —perceiving no triumph—was now fallen into a wistful muse, embittered, no doubt, by some unjust self-accusation.

"I think," he added, diffidently, looking up, "that it is a genuine conversion: I *think* it is. There is a blood feud against the man, and—he has laid off his weapons."

The convert (thought we) would soon be numbered with the martyrs!

THE SOUL OF THE COBBLER

It was the Sabbath; the sun was gone down, leaving the olive groves and vineyards in the purple shadow of the hills. Under cover of the dusk, it seemed, many men would come to evening service. "By the back door," the missionary whispered, "they steal in, these poor people—on the quiet, you understand? dressed in rags, in disguise, afraid to be known. They come; oh yes—they *come*, men!" There was a congregation of two in the bare little service-room: the convert, a weak-eyed shoemaker, and his apprentice. The boy was restless, bored, timid, and flea-bitten; the man snuggled to his new faith; he was ecstatically happy. But yet he lived in expectation of death: as how should he not?—a damned and outcast apostate, the object of a blood feud, who in obedience to the new teaching (and of his own notion) had put off his weapons and was become defenceless against his blood enemy and the hatred of his city. I remember him as a stalwart fellow, able, in fair fight, to hold his life against odds.

It was dark, and the street was silent and empty, when the apostate slunk away. Came then the missionary to us, despondently.

"Men," he began at once, but with distaste, "the Lord wished to humble us."

But why?

"I—I—*boasted*," he stammered, bitterly; "and only two came."

We had forgotten the promise of numbers.

"And, men," the good man concluded, speaking from the very dust of humiliation, "I—I—*am* humbled!"

Presently, however, and with better heart, he told us of sundry healings by prayer, and, after that, of a gracious miracle worked in his behalf. "It happened, men," he related, "on the road from Beersheba, at midsummer. It was hot. I tell you, men, it was *hot!* No sign of rain—dry midsummer. You don't expect clouds at midsummer, do you?—nothing short of a miracle, as it were, could produce them. And I couldn't stand the sun. No, men; I just *couldn't!* I knew I couldn't live another day without relief. So I thought I'd tell the Lord all about it. Just tell Him frankly, you know, and depend upon Him. And I did: just got right down on my knees that night, men, and told Him what I thought. 'Lord,' said I, 'I can't stand it. I would if I could; but I just *can't.* You'll have to save me—you'll have to do it, Lord—or I'll perish right here in the wilderness.' And next day, men, a little cloud covered the sun—no bigger than a man's hand. A little cloud—at midsummer! It didn't move away, remember: just hung right there, all day between the sun and me. And my life was saved. Now," he demanded, "what do you think of that?"

That a little cloud had intervened.

"I tell you, men," the missionary declared, in pathetic bewilderment, "I believe the Lord heard me—*that* time!"

THE SOUL OF THE COBBLER

We were given Godspeed in the olive grove, as we rode away, soon after dawn; and we keep the man in faith and in affection. He is a good man, a devoted and efficient man in his profession, and most tender.

II

CONCERNING THE WORLD IN THIS BLUE SPACE

LATE of that afternoon we came to Edh Dahariyeh, a village of the Bedouins who till the rich plains beyond Hebron and there dwell in peace and in submission: both peace and submission being contemptible to the war-like tribes of the great desert to the east, who successfully resist all authority. The people of the fields are much oppressed: the burden is of taxation: three thousand dollars are yearly extracted from a population of eight hundred men, women, and children, but leave no pennyworth of benefit to solace the ravished community. When the crops begin to spring and the flocks give promise, a Turkish assessor rides from Hebron, and upon every man levies according to the utmost power of that man to pay, so that some let their land lie fallow, and some, at news of his coming, slaughter their animals, rather than suffer an excessive extortion. The village is itself but a jumble of listless earthen huts, risen on a mound of its own refuse and ruins. Beneath the homes of this time are the forgotten chambers of the forefathers.

While the tents were rising on the common—a sweep of clean and close-cropped green—we came to the guest-room, as all good travellers must, or live ill-mannered, arrogant fellows in the recollection of these punctilious folk. Here was a hospitable refuge for wanderers of whatsoever degree, free to them, to sleep and pass on, unquestioned, or for three days to tarry, guests of the tribe: an admirable and saving custom of these parts. It was a dark and stagnant interior—a black shadow under the vault'd roof, I recall, into which a dusty sunbeam intruded through a high slit in the wall—but was now comfortably aglow at the coffee fire, where two ragged old men, whose turn it was (at the sheik's behest) to provide the travellers refreshment, were tossing the coals, in some ill humor. There was a good company squatting about in expectation of our coming; and they gave us *es-salâm 'aleikum* in no heartening fashion, but led us to the high seat, which they distinguished for us by spreading an *abba* taken from the back of a young man.

Then came the sheik, swaggering from the sunlight—a glum, impatient old man, tattooed on the tip of his nose, now wry-mouthed and out of sorts, wearing a blue *abba* of quality, all his garments soft and proudly flowing; but yet he was a man of no account, save here.

The ceremonial three cups of coffee were served to us in awkward silence.

"Now," the sheik demanded, on the heels of

the last gulp, "why have you slighted our hospitality?"

"We have pitched our tents," I protested, "on your common."

"It is true," he rejoined; "but you mock us."

"What mockery," I asked, angrily, "is there in this?"

"You ride down to Egypt," he replied. "It is a great journey. You will lie here and there by the way; and they will say to you: 'How fared you at Edh Dahariyeh? Did they take you in—at Edh Dahariyeh? Did they kill a sheep—at Edh Dahariyeh?' You will answer: 'They did not kill a sheep at Edh Dahariyeh; they left us to sleep in the open—at Edh Dahariyeh.' No traveller," the sheik boasted, but with what truth I know not, "lacks entertainment at Edh Dahariyeh. We are able to kill a sheep every day. Had you sent word of your coming, I would have had you to my house; but your mules came without warning, and your servants began to pitch your tents. We shall be laughed at for mean men from Edh Dahariyeh to Egypt."

The man, it seemed, would yet have us conscripts of his pride, and house us in his flea-run dwelling; and in the alarm of this prospect I turned to Aboosh—that admirable interpreter and guide.

"Ephraim," said I, firmly, "the man must be diverted. Ask him if the world is round or flat."

The diversion was effected: moreover—a sensation.

"If the world is flat," was the response, after some

heavy pondering, "I am content; if it is round, it is round by God's wisdom."

The men in the guest-room softly applauded. It was a characteristic thing: an evasion is with them equal to an answer. They drew nearer now, scenting a discussion of natural philosophy; and an expectant silence fell. They had forgotten the offence against the hospitality of their tribe.

"Answer me this," said the sheik: "how is the world supported in this blue space?"

"The world," I answered, cunningly, "depends upon the thread of God's will."

It was a sufficient answer: curiosity dared proceed no further; an inquiry beyond the comfortable explanation of God's will would be impiety.

There came shuffling to the tent at evening a ragged Bedouin with an ancient gold coin which he had ploughed out of the ground of that neighborhood. This was when the sky was red with sunset light and the village boys were idly switching the flocks across the common. We would not buy his treasure, having no wish to possess it; but indeed he pleaded until it seemed we must indulge him. "I am a poor man," said he, "with neither flocks nor family, and this gold coin is all that I have in the world. No rich travellers pass this way; but yet I must sell my coin, because I propose a journey, and I must sell it secretly lest the proceeds be taken away from me. It is my wish to escape into Egypt before I am called for service in the army and sent

into the south to die; and so I will exchange my coin for a coin of equal weight—a mere napoleon."

The exchange was managed, with something added to delight and surprise the man; and he shuffled away.

"He is not like the bookseller of Damascus," said the younger *khawaja*.

I laughed to recall that avaricious graybeard and his musty storehouse by the Great Mosque.

III

A BOOKSELLER OF DAMASCUS

THE bookseller of Damascus, whose bargaining the younger *khawaja* remembered, was a very old man—gray-bearded, scrawny-necked, pallid as an invalid, marvellously thin, bent at the shoulders, but dressed in a rich, fur-lined, perfectly tailored gown of gray cloth, and keen and bright of eye, though most calculating and avaricious: the eldest son (they said) of three generations of booksellers from that same stall in the bazar of the booksellers. He was in an unexpectedly amiable mood, it chanced, on the rainy day when the Interpreter and I fell in with him by his shop, beyond which, through a little gate, some glimpse was to be had of the great court-yard of the Mosque, the marble tiles glistening in the rain and light of the open sky. He would not only show us the books, but would deal with us, happily found we that which we desired to buy. And so, but lackadaisically, manifesting infinite boredom, he went with us, candle in hand, to his storehouse, which we must enter hurriedly, as though spied upon. This was up the steps, a turn to the right, an elbowing progress through the tide-

rip of humanity, and some yards of easier advancement to a low stone door, unlocked with a gigantic key. Ushered into uttermost darkness, we were provided with candles, told to search, and incontinently left to ourselves.

"Here," declared the Interpreter, "is an amazing thing!"

"But why?" I inquired.

"The man has left no servant to spy upon us. We must beware," he added; "there is an object in this."

In this storehouse—it seemed a vast place by the little light of one candle—reposed the accumulations of three generations of acquisitive booksellers of Damascus, drawn not only from the cities of Syria and Egypt, but, as it soon appeared, from Persia as well, where books were anciently well made. No cry of traffic could penetrate the heavy door; it was very still within, and lifeless, and aged, and musty. The floor was deep in dust; and every book that was touched—every leaf that was stirred—gave off each its little puff. The floor was littered, the corners heaped, the shelves crowded: many thousands of volumes had here been cast and forgotten—acquired and held possessed in the Mohammedan way. I recall great books, written upon parchment by skilful hands, long, long ago, exquisitely illuminated and bound—a long, ill-kept row of these, so thick with black dust, which had even sifted between the leaves, that I fancied they had not been touched in a hun-

dred years. Presently I came upon many covers of antique tomes, gold-leafed and deeply tooled and beautified with slender flourishes—all stripped from the original books, which had been rebound for sale. Near by a crazy stair—cluttered with books—which led perilously to the loft, was a collection of little volumes, in dusty heaps on a high shelf: thin little books, delicately written by hand and as delicately illuminated; some poetry, I recall, and some pious discussions.

I fell in love with one (as they say)—the tints and interlacing lines and gilding of the title-page, all masterfully accomplished, enduring to this time without a faded color or other blemish.

"This little book," said the Interpreter, presently, "is a collection of philosophical poems, more than one hundred years old, composed (as here is written) by the talented daughter of a certain learned, wise, famous, and wealthy prince; but the name of the scribe is omitted."

"Then," said I, "here is a story: The beautiful daughter of the prince, exercising her talent in his delight, had these poems inscribed by a master, and presented them to her father to win his praise."

"It may be so," he agreed.

"But," I protested, "it is indeed so; there is no other copy in all the wide world."

"That," said he, "is undoubtedly true."

As the Interpreter bent with me over the volume, translating, we were interrupted by a soft, asthmatic wheeze; and I turned with a start to find the pallid

bookseller at my very shoulder, his head thrust forward—his scrawny beard, drawn cheeks, and avaricious eyes. He had come softly to spy upon us, as he had intended when he left us alone; and having in this way discovered our real desire, was prepared to exact the value of it to the last franc. At once we bargained for the book; the Interpreter gleefully sustained the argument, but was in a state of wrath and perspiration when at last the money was paid down, and had no good word to say for the bookseller in English. For my bargain (since in Damascus bargaining is a polite accomplishment) I will say this: that next day, when I causally exposed the book in an antique-shop much frequented by tourists in the season, the dealer thrust his hand into his money-drawer and cast to the counter, from a handful of gold, three times the sum I had paid; but I would not take him up.

I still carried the book in my hand when we came to the door of the bookseller's storehouse, but was then all at once seized violently by the arm, smartly chided, and charged to conceal the volume (the bookseller having first kissed it) until we were well departed from the neighborhood.

"This virtuous Mohammedan," the Interpreter explained with contempt, "will not sell holy books to Christians—when anybody is looking."

I indulged the old man's scruples by concealing the book; and we were then ushered into the street in the most friendly and innocent fashion in the world.

IN THE MARKET PLACE

"What is the occasion of the man's secrecy?" I asked, presently. "Has he broken the law in this transaction?"

"He has broken the law, of course," the Interpreter replied; "but that is nothing in itself. The thing is important only if it be discovered by an enemy more powerful than he. Not long ago in this street of the booksellers," he continued, as, departing from that quarter, we paused at the entrance of the bazar, "a Mohammedan of upright character and pious and honorable life earned a slender livelihood by means of the binding and sale of books of unimpeachable loyalty to Mohammed and the Sultan. He was an inoffensive person, past middle age, unaccused of crime, living, doubtless, in expectation of a peaceful death in this guileful and envious city, breathing no sedition, dealing for fair profit, reciting the prayers at the appointed intervals, in every way observing the forms of his religion and practising the spirit of it. It chanced, however, that he won the enmity of a neighbor, a man of power and wealth, who would take his ease on the roof and ogle the bookseller's youngest wife whenever she appeared, so that presently, so persistent was the offence, she might never breathe the air except through the meshes of a black veil, not even in the privacy of her own roof. From this wicked infatuation, of course, resulted the poor booskeller's destruction. It seems that at the same time that he was expecting a consignment of books from Cairo, his eldest son, by

another wife, was about to return from America, being in ill health and about to die. When it came time for the young man and the books to arrive at Beirut, the covetous neighbor caused to be included with the books certain volumes of a violently seditious teaching, and to be discovered in the luggage of the son certain offensive drawings of the Sultan himself. The neighbor was a man of wealth and influence, and in consequence the thing was not difficult to manage.

"'But,' cried the poor bookseller, when he was accused, 'I did not order the books!'

"'Nevertheless,' they answered, 'here are the forbidden volumes in the bale.'

"'These papers,' the son protested, 'I have never seen before!'

"'Ah,' they answered, 'but we have found them in your trunk.'

"The result was," the Interpreter concluded, "that father and son were cast into prison. The son languished and died, but the father was liberated when the Turks had sucked his fortune from him. I have not seen the man for a very long time."

"And the young wife?" I inquired.

"Really," the Interpreter replied, "I do not know what became of her."

I wondered—perhaps unkindly—how the covetous neighbor had been made aware of the poor bookseller's most intimate affairs.

IV

IN CAMP AT BEERSHEBA

WE came to Beersheba from Edh Dahariyeh next day, in a windstorm, a driving gale, the horses lagging dispirited. The air was parching and misty with dust blown in from the wilderness; and some idle old wiseacres, loitering near, said that all travellers in the sandy desert would be in peril. It is a mushroom trading settlement, for these six years a struggling market-place, they had digged up the ruins of the ancient city to make new habitations: a turn of the spade, and here are the squared blocks of fallen palaces ready to hand. The *kaimakam* said that we must ride thence to Gaza on our way to El Arish, or ride no farther on our journey, lest we come to harm on the plains, where, said he, were many Bedouins and no familiar paths. "Everybody," said this timid man, "rides to Gaza, and therefore must you. If you took the path of your choosing, and met with evil treatment, how should I escape?" We would not buy his acquiescence (were that his meaning), but quietly planned to depart in the early morning, choosing the shorter way to the half-way station of Rafieh, which was to our liking.

There at Beersheba are Abraham's wells: and this being the very frontier of the hardiest tourist wanderings—the farthest objective of all those devoted pilgrimages which astound and disquiet the simple traveller—we determined that our departure thence upon the untrodden ways into Egypt should in some meet way be signalized. It was no flagrant expression of distaste for trip-ticket company, which, in Palestine, whatever elsewhere, is somehow peculiarly grateful even to the hapless apostate (as I have been told)—like the sweet simplicity of children. Our small celebration should be like a saucy snap of the fingers directed at whatsoever had been irksome or fearful or bewildering in the lives we had lived; here, at last (thought we), was the road beyond—free and still, leading far and strangely upon which no disturbing word might follow from any yesterday.

Ali Mahmoud, the big muleteer, acquainted with the *khawaja's* convivial intention, instantly proposed a sheep, tender with youth and the new grass of those green hills, to be boiled with rice in a great copper pot, which the cook must borrow from the town, and sauced with curry, to which the *khawaja's* excellency might add sour pickles, were his generosity only sufficient to that altitude of magnificence. Presently, thereafter, the cook slaughtered a sheep in the street, operating with gravity, in the presence of a covetous throng. I fancied, looking about upon all those desirous eyes and uneasy lips and tongues,

that the inward clamor of Beersheba would be a tumult had I the ears to hear it.

The carcass was shouldered into camp, however, in peace, and promptly packed away in the pot, which Ali Mahmoud had himself wrested from a solitary Bedouin encamped near by, having satisfied the wretched man, after loud browbeating, with a mere promise of reward, in the persuasive Syrian way.

I observed while we waited that the younger *khawaja* was industriously employed with a pencil and paper.

"This," said he, looking up at last, "is New-Year's eve?"

"How do you know it?" I demanded.

"I have figured it out," he answered, triumphantly.

Here, then, was reasonable occasion: I substituted it for that sentimental consideration which had inspired our feast, and was the more at ease for having my feet upon such solid ground.

It was bitterly dark abroad when the admirable Aboosh fetched us to complete the squatting circle of muleteers and camp servants in the cook's tent. The wind was blowing high from the stony wilderness of Beersheba—that vast dread barren—and the rain was driving past in noisy showers; but the tent was warm and light with many candles, the flap was pegged tight against the wet draught, the feast was spread fragrant and bounteously, and the company

was of excellent humor and many jovial accomplishments. The younger *khawaja*, expanding after meat, would exhibit the magic stick at pleasure (said he); and this he moved to do, but found no stick at hand, save the donkey-stick of the young impish Hamed, which he must magically convert into a stick of that magical quality demanded by the feat.

It was not a difficult thing to do: the younger *khawaja* had in the seclusion of his tent suspended a black thread from knee to knee, so that, squatting behind the candle-light, with the thread drawn taut, he was enabled to persuade the very donkey-stick of Hamed to stand upright between his legs, without the support of so much as a finger-tip, like any stick of indubitably magical pedigree and power. Search as they might for the magical means commanded by the younger *khawaja*, they could not see the thread, against which the stick leaned. The thing remained a mystery; and in return for this amazing exhibition, Ali Mahmoud, vainglorously bristling his red stubble of beard, said that he would then entertain the company by relating the most humorous story ever known to have slipped from the tongue of any inventor of tales since the very world began, called by those Bedouins of far Nejd "The Tale of the Camel which Flew."

It was a successful adventure for Ali Mahmoud: from Elias of Jerusalem, the cook's boy, to the exquisite Aboosh himself, they were by turns all enwrapped and shaken with laughter; and I wish that

I might repeat the story, but am unable, for Aboosh softly informed me, when I demanded the interpretation, that the English language, being somewhat inadequate in respect to double meanings, made it impossible for him to convey the delectable indelicacy of the tale in any chaste form.

"It is the way," said he, by way of apology, his eye speculatively regarding me, "with many charming Bedouin tales."

I made no demand upon his modesty.

"They may be told in Arabic," he continued, with relief, "but not even thought of in English."

Having now feasted heartily, we had accomplished little enough, after all, upon the body of that sheep; there remained fragments.

"Are there no hungry hereabout?" I asked.

The cook discovered seven patient Bedouins of that wilderness waiting in the rain.

"To whomsoever will eat," said I.

A curious thing happened: The seven came gravely to share our beneficence, with neither bristling of pride nor lessening of it, without fawning, envy, or awkwardness, with no appearance of hatred or demeaning humility, but proceeding, in all things, as with propriety. Here (thought I) were late guests at our table; and I must, somehow, exchange the polite expressions with them before they ate of that which was left, lest I suffer in that dignity and munificence which all these folk conceived me to possess. It was agreeable, indeed, to encounter

those who might without offence receive the crumbs from our table. Elsewhere (I am told) in those places where independence is the fashionable estate —this may not be done: it seems that none is permitted to take bounty and live respected, nor are many able to dispense it without pride: there are the needy and the beneficent, but inharmoniously related.

V

A WAYSIDE MINSTREL

WE were astir before dawn, moving with some contemptuous caution, to outwit the *kaimakam*, who had forbidden our departure toward the plains It was still raining; but the great wind of yesterday, which had distressed our beasts, was now fallen away, and the showers came gently from the vanishing shadows roundabout. At peep of day the sky beyond the farthest outline of the hills gave rosy promise; and it was all warm and yellow in the world when we came to the fertile plateau beyond Beersheba. The new corn, springing after rain, glistened in the sunlight, stretching from the sandy paths we rode to the haze of distance and the blue loom of some great hills; and over this illimitable field ran the shadows of great flying masses of cloud --here a clear shadow and there a far-off streaming shower of rain. There was a traveller to the wretched town, carrying grain on the back of his camel, who passed timidly, but with some pleasant salutation, albeit uttered haltingly; there were shy shepherds by the way, with staves and pipes, who, lacking courage to gaze, fled with the sheep at our

approach; but there was no other human, it seemed, to encounter, though we espied the black tents and morning fires of the pastoral Bedouins of those parts. We basked in the ease and comfortable heat of our journey, riding idly, with reins fallen; since we might encamp at pleasure, no need commanded us; remained to us unimpaired what will we had and all the hours of day. The caravan dawdled after: I caught ear of the lazy "Dee-up!" of Hamed to his donkey, the laughter of Ali Mahmoud, the chatter of the cook and the muleteers, the bells of our mules. These were grateful sounds, indeed, come from a mellowing distance to the sunshine and wide prospect of earth and cloudy sky.

It was a pleasant thing (thought I) to travel thus in spring weather.

Presently we were in the way of overtaking a traveller whose curious behavior I had from time to time remarked. He was a furtive fellow, going afoot, who would now make haste, now loiter, now pause without occasion, all the while keeping watch upon us over his shoulder. It appeared as we drew near that he wore neither the *kaffiyeh* nor *abba*—the headdress and enveloping cloak—of those wandering folk of the deserts and outlying fields, but was clad in the skirt and jacket of the wall (as they say), his head bound about with a limp white cloth. It was a circumstance to excite the wonder of any man.

"Here is no Bedouin," said I.

"Nor an Egyptian returning to Cairo," replied Aboosh, who rode with me. "This is a Mohammedan of some Syrian town."

"At any rate," said I, "he travels to Egypt."

"It is some poor fool," Aboosh declared, in pity, "who will surely perish in the desert between."

"Where there is a Mohammedan," said I, "there is charity."

"In that desert," he answered, now fallen deep in troubled concern for the adventurer, "there is no compassion."

"Where there is hunger," I insisted, "there is compassion among Mohammedans."

He looked at me with a little twinkle of sophistication. "And thirst?" he asked.

"Truly," I answered, doubtfully.

"You may think so," said he, with a grim little laugh.

We were now upon the heels of the gentleman, whom we hailed authoritatively; and he turned in response, overwilling to be bidden to this intimacy. He was a youth—a jovial, ragged, irreverent rogue (I observed), now upon his mettle, if ever a quick brown eye betrayed the truth. Aboosh exchanged words with him; and thereupon, to my amazement, the admirable dragoman instantly burst into laughter, which continued until he was perilously situated upon his horse. I had not expected laughter: I had looked for a frowning countenance—some accusation and fatherly solicitude. "He is a rascal!" Aboosh explained (meaning a comical fellow). It

seemed, indeed, that he was; there were more words, more laughter—but yet the same calculating twinkle in the brown eyes afoot. I perceived a rhythm in the young man's talk, a rhyme, too—a sweet and tender agreement of sounds—and I surmised that he was improvising: which turned out to be true; he had taken, as I learned at the end of our journey, the trailing caravan, the luxuriously riding dragoman, and the awkwardness of the gray-haired *khawaja* for the subject of some sarcastic versification. But I did not know it then: I was at the time interested to observe that he was young and unprovided, picturesquely lacking in every precaution, and of a jovial disposition—expecting the gifts of the gods, it seemed, in return for this ready-flowing wit: a ragged, helpless, most sanguine traveller, depending upon the chances of the road for sustenance and all the comfort of companionship. I fancy that his rhymes had been fashioned to enrapture the excellent Aboosh while the desperate poet awaited our approach over the wet alien plains.

"I am Rachid," said he, in answer to my question, "a coffee-maker of Jerusalem, last employed by David's Gate."

"What do you," I asked, "alone upon these far plains?"

"I travel into Egypt."

"It is a journey," said I, "perilous to a lonely man."

"Who travels in good company," he replied, "travels securely and in plenty."

IN THE COFFEE-HOUSE RACHID HAD SAT WITH THREE YOUTHS

"What company awaits you?"

"I ask no better," he answered, touching his lips and forehead, "than the company of the *khawaja's* excellency."

"Come!" said I, delighted, "I will hear your story."

We rode on, at a foot pace, with Rachid abreast. It seemed that in the coffee-house by David's Gate this Rachid had not long since sat with three youths of the town. "Come!" said one; "how shall a young man fare in Egypt?" "It is beyond doubt," answered another, "that he will easily prosper." "But," asked Rachid, "how shall a young man with but three copper *beshliks* to his name go down to Egypt?" "In three days," replied the second, "two rich travellers depart from Jerusalem to cross the desert, as it is said in the town; there is nothing easier than to take service with them." Failing to obtain this service, Rachid determined, nevertheless, to follow his adventure; he would go down to Egypt, come what might, and there abundantly prosper. "I will depart this very night," thought he, "running in advance of these travellers, and when three days of their journey have passed I will present myself with all the wit that I have. Delighted with me, they will beg me to accompany them, and I will tell many stories, sing many songs, be watchful in service, never failing in good-humor, so that when the journey is over they will give me a gift of gold, with which I shall found a fortune in Egypt." From Jerusalem, then, went he to Hebron, to the Bedouin

villages, to Beersheba, and to the plains beyond, where, compelled now of hunger to be overtaken, he had awaited our caravan, spending the night in the open, lest his intention to depart from Palestine be discovered by the soldiery of the town.

"The *khwaja*," he concluded, desperately, "will be delighted with me."

We accepted him forthwith.

"I should like," said he, now frankly grave, "to kiss the *khwaja's* hand in token of my bondage to his generosity."

"Had you not rather eat a loaf of the *khwaja's* bread?" I asked.

He insisted that this was not so, but ate with interest, you may be sure, when he got the bread in his fingers, and then fell back to accompany the muleteers. At noon, while we lay resting, I heard the laughter of their approach, and conceived them a happy company, and I observed as they passed that they travelled in a jostling group, with the roguish Rachid declaiming in the midst, his hands gesturing, his eyes wide with the excitement of his tale, so forgetful in this occupation of the rough places of the road that he stumbled as he went. When I turned, it was to the amazing discovery of Aboosh in the act of listening to the departing story. He lifted a finger for the indulgence of silence—for a moment longer cocked his ear—and presently (with all the muleteers) burst into a roar of laughter as the entertaining Rachid concluded his recital.

VI

TEARS IN THE NIGHT

WE encamped on a grassy plain where foot-paths crossed—foot-paths wandering idly nowhere (it seemed), used by bare-footed, casual folk, going with grave steps. It was not a nameless place; but I cannot spell the name, nor can any one I know. Near by was the sun-baked mud shop of an Egyptian trader with a wily, oily way, situate conveniently at these cross-roads, who kept cheap things for sale, but must have starved had his stomach been of a lusty sort. The black tents of a shepherding Bedouin tribe were set in orderly arrangement beyond: whence was no issue of commotion, but only the appearing lights of hearth fires (in that dusk) and the drone of a sleepy, amicable life. Here, indeed, was a peaceful prospect of darkening space and grass and high sky; and it was very still in the world: I fancied that in this obscure by-place all people went on tiptoe and spoke in whispers. In the vision of those mild days it appears to me now as an expression of the Twenty-third Psalm. It was a fertile pasture, a great land, stretching unbroken, save where the new-ploughed brown earth gave promise of the sustaining green;

and though no river was flowing near, yet there was a spring of water, whence the Bedouin children came, driving donkeys, bearing great water-jars, making no sound but a soft and musical encouragement as they switched and called the homeward way. When night was come at last—the Arab fires extinguished, the last child home from the well, the crimson glow of day withdrawn, the splendor of stars appearing above the vacant shadows of the plain—we lay down to sleep with willing souls.

I was awakened in the night by some one sobbing by the tent door.

"Who is that?" I called.

There was no answer; but presently I heard Aboosh whispering in a soothing way. Again I demanded to know the cause of this grief.

"It is Rachid," Aboosh answered: "he is homesick for his mother."

Poor Rachid!

"Rachid asks me to say," Aboosh continued, after an interval, through which the wretched boy had sobbed and spoken and chattered (in the cold night air), "that he wishes the *khawaja* to sleep, dreaming of him as smiling in the light of the *khawaja's* favor."

I promised Rachid this indulgence.

"He has never before been from home," said Aboosh, interpreting, "and is much surprised; the width of these plains has frightened him, and he wishes for the buildings of some city."

"Provide him," said I, distressed, "with sufficient to return to Jerusalem."

There was then a great whispering without. I detected in the voice of Aboosh a deal of admonishment; he was a person most fatherly to the unfortunate (because of the exhausting experiences of his youth), but was now hardly more than a man grown. Rachid protested; he had forgot, it seemed, the wish for his mother.

"Come!" I cried, impatient.

"He will persist," Aboosh answered.

"But why," I complained, "if he is to continue unhappy?"

Aboosh laughed softly.

"Well?" said I.

"I cannot tell you in English; the young man has spoken his answer in rhyme."

"You can try."

"He says," Aboosh reported, laboriously, "that though the walls of a room are like the arms of a mother in the night, a distant adventure is like the lips of some veiled woman observed in passing."

"Then by all means," said I, heartily, "let him come into Egypt!"

"But why, sir?" Aboosh asked, puzzled.

I was glad to stand by the spirit of poetry and to welcome the pursuit of romance in a youth; but this I could not explain.

"He wants," said Aboosh, in bewilderment, "only to see the lights of Cairo."

"Let him see the lights of Cairo," I answered, in a way to leave open no reply.

That was the end of it: Aboosh went to bed, leaving Rachid to curl up under his mat again, shivering in the night air sufficiently to make any other poet, however exalted above gross comfortable things, willing to exchange a rhyme for the warmth of a rug and an enclosed room. But I was troubled; it seemed to me, after all, that the adventure of this poet—cast unknowing into the greedy world of Cairo—would result disastrously.

VII

GOING EAST AND WEST

WE moved, soon after dawn, into the farther plains, toward the desert. I remember that the white mule, which led the caravan of pack-animals, bedecked with beads and many bells, according to her degree, and jealous of that leadership, was impatient to be gone with her load, knowing well enough that she might not rest (nor might any muleteer) until the smell of water indicated the end of her day's labor. "Whishie"—that stray dog of Jerusalem which had followed our fortunes for dear and constant love of the white mule—barked her into subserviency to the raucous commands of Ali Mahmoud in a fashion most intelligent, but then neglected her utterly, being interested in the pursuit of great brown field-mice, which she could not resist, and in certain investigations of the sandy ground quite beyond humans to fathom. We were presently gone from that peaceful encampment, to which I shall ever wish to return, for the sake of that still, grassy space, the green fertility, the soft-speaking, robed, and barefooted inhabitants, quietly living—fairly under way, now, the camp-folk following, if

laughter (Rachid being with them) and tinkling bells meant anything.

We proceeded, riding lazily, in the spirit lifting grateful arms to the new-washed sky, to the sunshine, the green of earth, to the cool dew, fallen thick, and more lovely than diamond-sparkling, upon the soft road we travelled and all the world beyond. By-and-by we fell in with a Bedouin in transit over the plains, as one moving his household, and stopped to exchange the salutations of the road. It was a curious procession: a gravely robed man on the extreme of a small donkey (with a foal following); two lean camels, of tender age, bearing no loads; two women and various children (numbering not more than four), walking afoot; three frowsy horses, burdened to the uttermost; a led mare, and two diminutive oxen.

"Where go you, friend?" I asked.

"I change my place," said he.

"But why?" I pursued.

"There was nothing left in the place I was," he answered.

"To what place do you go?" I asked, the plain apparently offering no better situation than that which he had abandoned: the whole good pasture.

"To some other place," said he.

"What advantage?"

"By God! friend," he replied, testily, "it is another place."

WE WERE PRESENTLY GONE FROM THAT PEACEFUL ENCAMPMENT

Soon thereafter—while Rachid, trotting by my stirrup, was engaged with some tale of the Wise Cadi of Al Bursah—we encountered a worn young wretch plodding eastward toward Beersheba.

"Whence?" I asked.

"These many days from Egypt," said he.

The desert had left him ragged and gaunt; but I fancied that, however spent he was, this blossoming and well-watered country would presently revive him, and I was glad that he had achieved it.

"Why this arduous journey?" said I.

"It is said in Egypt," he answered, hopefully, "that a young man will surely thrive in Jerusalem."

Rachid did not resume the tale of the Wise Cadi of Al Bursah. He had heard the traveller's answer; and he was perhaps perturbed that he should be trudging hopefully westward whence this gaunt man had come. He wandered ahead, and there maintained his distance, as we rode, appearing disheartened. When it came to the beating heat of noon, and we dismounted to rest, he sat on his haunches, apart from us, his head fallen between his knees (who was used at all such times to a lively and encouraging behavior at our elbows)—a limp and downcast poet, it seemed. When, however, we had eaten, he approached, and, having ceremoniously bowed, begged leave to recite a little composition relating to certain recent incidents of the road. He declaimed with a relish, I need not say, and with all those little evidences of delight with his inspiration to which we are used in

poets; but yet his eyes would somewhat pathetically stray from the eyes of Aboosh—to whom the verses must needs be first delivered—to those of the *khawaja*, who must necessarily fail to perceive the finer aspects of the poem. No doubt the dragoman's interpretation did the genius of this stray youth a drear injustice; there was no help for it, and I am glad that Rachid could not know. I recall something of the composition: That it dealt with the restless Bedouin, a dull fellow, changing his place without purpose, with whom, contrasted, was the youth from Egypt, a man moved by a mercenary ambition to undertake a perilous journey; whence it proceeded to describe the hare-brained adventure of the poet as some high aspiration toward that which I must call Romance.

Rachid received our applause with joy, and ran off, with "Whishie," the dog, to join the muleteers, who had passed by.

In these days was an agreeable amazement: no desert this, but a wide and fertile land, lying between the sea, which once glimpsed blue and far away, and a range of barren mountains, three days' journey inland. It yields abundantly to an indolent cultivation; and for the rich harvest come in the season a host of eager Egyptians, with their long trains of camels, to trade for the grain: so that (said they) there were a thousand tents pitched hereabouts, and a joyous activity, with spectacles and merrymaking, like a fair. Everywhere I observed fragments of

earthen water-jars. How long the goats'-hair tents have been moving over these plains God knows, but it seems that every foot of the land must in its day have been a warm hearth. They were now turning the brown fields, with camels harnessed to the plough, or sowing, in the ancient way, a hand scattering over the shallow furrows. I remember this as a dewy, pastoral land, of wet brown earth, shy flowers, of wide sky and great clouds, of flocks returning in the dusk, of a soft-speaking, gentle people—plains of uttermost peace.

No day lacked its simple interests. There were gazelles by the way, little, leaping things, flashing off from a nervous browsing to the seclusion of distance, having no other cover. A ruined house, melancholy in the midst of a cactus-walled garden of fig-trees, informed us of the death of a great pastoral sheik, accomplished in a night assault by the enemies of his tribe. The plains were dotted in a curiously regular fashion with lily clusters (not yet in bloom), set out, like surveyors' stakes, to mark the boundaries of ownership; and here and there, by the roadside, some crusty fellows had raised little ridges of sand, like graves, to warn trespassers from their ground. Rach d sang love-songs, and Ali Mahmoud told tales, and Aboosh related his experiences, and Yusef, the cook, worked his daily miracles with a charcoal stove, and the white mule was amazingly industrious, an example to the others, and the dog companionable. Travelling thus happily, we fell in at last with the

camel-riding Turks who patrol the frontier to prevent the escape of the Sultan's unwilling subjects from Palestine into Egypt (whereupon Rachid trembled exceedingly, but was not questioned), and that evening crossed the border at Rafieh, much relieved to be beyond Abdul Hamid's jurisdiction, whom we had not learned to love in his own dominions.

Here began, abruptly, like a bald spot, the sandy desert of Et Tih; and here we entered the ancient caravan route to Cairo. From the summit of a gentle rise of fading green earth we first beheld the yellow expanse and a patch of cool blue sea; and we were much moved, so that we paused, without intention to halt, and spoke never a word at all. It seemed (I recall) that at some other time, having come to the crest of a little hill, I had stood unexpectedly confronting an infinite distance of hot sand; and then I remembered—the impression of that other moment vividly returning—that I had never looked upon a desert before, but had once first seen the sea.

"Well," Aboosh ejaculated, snapping the tension, "there it is!"

All at once the younger *khawaja* spurred his horse to a gallop; and the whole caravan, with much shouting and noise of bells, clattered down the hill at a furious pace and crossed the boundary into Egypt.

VIII

A FLEA ON THE BOUNDARY LINE

UNTIL this time there had come with us from Hebron a Turkish soldier, riding a young camel whose virtues he boasted—and, indeed, exhibited: the clean limbs, the stride, and the docility of the beast. It seemed a worthy camel: a camel of excellent humor and of distinguished promise; and it was much coveted by the way. At night, as the custom is, the man was used to sleeping close to his beast, the winds being chill; but now, at Rafieh, while the mules were unloading and the cook was coaxing his fire, he tethered the camel, flung his saddle on the sand, and went off to the mud barracks to hobnob with the Egyptian frontier guard. I was presently alarmed by the cook's outcry and a rising excitement in camp: the docile camel was viciously trampling his master's saddle, stupidly believing that he was engaged in his master's murder—a savage and dreadful attack, a rearing and heavy plunge.

"What!" ejaculated the Turk, when he was informed of this. "Have I cherished a man-killer?"

The camel was heartily beaten and reduced to his

knees, whereupon his doubled fore leg was tied so that he could rise but with difficulty, and we withdrew to observe his behavior, for his master was not yet convinced. Rise he did, a persistent, silent effort, and cautiously approached the saddle, which he attacked as savagely as before, but now with one hoof.

"I have had a narrow escape," said the Turk: 'my camel would have killed me to-night. By God and Mohammed the Prophet of God!" he swore, "I will put the beast in the bazar at Beersheba."

I inquired concerning the future owner's prospect of long life.

"He is in God's hands," was the answer.

This is a disposition much feared in a camel; the soldier's beast (they said) should have been butchered for food, lest he accomplish a murder. I have heard of a revengeful camel which bit off the top of a boy's head; but though the disposition is known to all men, some say that camels do not employ their teeth in attack.

Rachid was affected to the pitch of bewilderment by the change of authority over him. We were every one elated; one cannot pass at a step from the infinite annoyance of misgovernment to an honorably regulated dominion and know no relief. There were those of our company, indeed, who turned about toward Palestine and with meaning maledictions cursed that sovereign whom they called "The Murderer";

and I recall that those of us who might have known better idiotically footed an imaginary line which we conceived to be the boundary, and in unison (after some hilarious rehearsal) expressed a sulphurous wish concerning the self-same Mighty One, of whose acts we had learned much in these months. Rachid, however, made off toward the column whence the boundary cuts into the southeastern deserts; and so amazing was his behavior—far off and alone in the red sunset light—that I must follow to discover its significance. He would now squat in Egypt, there remaining motionless, turned toward that green and ever greener land whence we had ridden, until all at once he would leap into Palestine, where he would stand with arms folded and head fallen forward, staring through drawn brows into the sandy desert and to the inviting light of the heavens beyond.

"I stand here," said he, in vast excitement, when we interrupted him, "and may be seized for a soldier or imprisoned to satisfy a rich enemy or throttled to please the Vali of a province; but I move one step, which the *khawaja* will observe"—he came from Palestine into Egypt at a bound—"and behold! the power of these great men has vanished: I am no longer the slave of the old masters, but have become," he added, with a wry mouth, "the servant of masters whose faces I have not seen and whose ways are new. I am troubled in Egypt," said he, returning to Palestine, "being a young man far from

home and ignorant of the customs; but I am frightened in Palestine, because I am a Mohammedan, of age to serve in the Sultan's army, and have once fled from my city—" and forthwith the tortured poet hastened into Egypt.

"It is evident," I observed, "that you are doomed to live the life of an uneasy flea on the boundary line."

"Has the *khawaja* spoken my fate?"

"Not so," I answered; "you may continue with us, truly!"

"I have succeeded mightily," said he, in pride, "in escaping from Jerusalem."

"Having departed without authority," I demanded, "how, then, shall you ever return?"

"I will never return," he answered, sadly.

"How shall you endure when the old voices call?"

In the way of poets, his imagination was quick to respond to this pinprick; and he sighed, replying slowly, "I will not listen."

"How if they speak wofully in the night?"

"My heart," he answered, whispering, "must have no ears."

The poet turned his back on Palestine and followed me to the tents; and to the joy of Aboosh and the muleteers he was presently spouting doggerel in some genial teasing of the cook, who had chanced to overturn a pot of water on his fire. I fancied, then, that the determination to adventure in Cairo was fixed, and I was glad that I should suffer no more in sympathy with the young man's homesickness.

It seemed to me, too, I recall, that some poem would doubtless flower from his unhappy experience by the ancient granite column, and that we should be entertained on the day's march with the recital, possibly when the way was hot and wearisome and the spirits of our company had drooped; but there was no poem to delight us: Rachid, observe, was as wayward as any great poet.

IX

THE RUNAWAY BRIDE

HERE, then, we entered again the old route into Egypt, travelled these ages, but now almost forsaken: a long, voiceless, glowing road, touching the shore of the sea, wandering over blistered salt bottoms, past stagnant, encrusted pools, through deep sand, drifted in hills, smoking in the wind. There is some commerce between Gaza and El Arish, between El Arish and the canal, brief trains of camels carrying grain; and in the season droves of camels pass from the great Arabian Desert to the markets of Egypt; but no opulent caravans go that w y, as formerly, nor is there anywhere the suggestion of a former importance, save at Rafieh, where a broken granite column lies beside the road, half buried in the sand.

Beyond El Arish is no town, no considerable habitation—no more, at that season, than the huts of the keepers of the wells, and widely dispersed groups of goats'-hair tents, sheltering a beggarly crew of lean, low-living Bedouins. Wells are at merciful intervals—deep holes in the sand, well kept in these days of the Occupation, but accumulating

brackish, bitter water. One well of sweet water I recall in a six days' journey. They may be sunk in a barren, without a bush or blade of grass to grace the neighborhood; at the most beautiful, a grove of date-palms rises from the sand. There is no oasis of the imagination on the desolate and forgotten caravan route that crosses the sandy desert of Et Tih into Egypt. It is a broiling path—hardly tolerable at mid-day, even in January.

In two days, the sun a blistering, white-hot light, puffs of gritty dust rising with listless weight under the hoofs of our horses, we were at El Arish, a little city of blinding square white houses, builded in deep sand, near by the sea.

Approaching El Arish—passing now, in the mid-day heat, over rolling sand, from which, here and there, dry, gray bushes sprang—our company halted to observe a curious and disquieting sight: a woman in flight—slipping like a hare from bush to bush; stopping, exhausted, then venturing desperately on. Whither she fled, God knew, for her face was turned to the very heart of the desert, and there she must surely perish: there was neither water nor encampment in that forlorn direction, as we knew. There came over a near-by rise, while we debated, a Soudanese of the garrison, riding a camel, which he had at the trot, and a gray-bearded old man, with his loins girt up, running afoot, the breath almost gone from his creaking body. At sight of the small, flee-

ing figure they swerved from the road, hastened the faltering pace, and presently overtook the fugitive, whom the old man caught by the wrist and roughly persuaded to return.

"I am her uncle," he explained, but not unkindly; "she has no other relative, and she has run away from her husband, to whom I gave her."

She was but a girl, a child, over-young to be married, it seemed, and though her face was in part veiled and in part concealed by bangles, it was apparent that she was comely, if only with youth.

"Has she done a wrong?"

"It is not that," he replied; "it is because I guaranteed her behavior, and must now restore her or pay the penalty."

"My husband is old," said the girl, defiantly, "and beats me."

"What refuge," I asked, "did you think to find in the desert hereabout?"

She answered, sullenly, like a child, "I was running away."

El Arish, to which we came that day, lay near the sea, past a fruitful, primitively irrigated sand plain where date-palms and fig-trees and sprawling vines grew in the sand, and where were green and flourishing vegetable patches. It is a city, beautiful in these parts, of many low white houses, blinding in the sunlight, of streets ankle deep with sand, of bazars and mosques, of a small military establishment, under the English, a city of eight thousand inhabitants

EL ARISH THE HALF-WAY CITY OF THE CARAVAN ROUTE

(I think)—a seat of justice, at any rate; for next morning the runaway wife was taken before the cadi of the district for judgment. "I will not live with my husband," said she, "except I have my will in a certain matter." The cadi asked for an explanation, whereupon a curious thing happened. "It is my will," said the girl, "that my uncle shall give his daughter to my husband's eldest son, which he has refused to do. Upon these terms I will return to my husband, and will continue dutiful." It was then so agreed among them, and the grateful cadi dismissed them all.

They said in the town that the girl loved her husband's son, and had sacrificed herself to his happiness; and of the young man good words were spoken.

The foreminded Aboosh must here outfit for the longer stage, six days of desert riding, to the Suez Canal, where, at Kantara, was a railroad train, Cairo bound. It was with a caravan of self-satisfying proportions that we departed: I was reminded of a ship leaving some port, abundantly crewed and provisioned; and, indeed, we were like those going out to the barren sea. There was now a great company of men and beasts: Aboosh, a dragoman of tact and most perceiving consideration, with Taufik, his lieutenant, and that big Ali Mahmoud, of whom I have spoken, who was in almost sheikly authority over five cutthroat-appearing muleteers; a cook of engaging accomplishments, the pock-marked Yusef,

with Elias, the serving-boy; a Soudanese corporal, taken from the garrison of El Arish, who must (they said) be guard on the way; Rachid of Jerusalem, that derelict, and Mustafa, the entertaining camel-driver, with his six slow-footed beasts and five camel-boys — men and boys to the number of twenty, and horses, mules, donkeys, and camels to the number of twenty-four. Following along the sandy route of that great desert, trailing over the flat salt-bottoms to which we came, it seemed a company disproportionate to the needs of two unostentatious travellers; but the thrifty Aboosh, who had contracted with us, smiled indulgently, saying, "It is not the habit of the dragoman to waste his dollars." It turned out, indeed, that this was no extravagant and displayful progress; our water was spent, our provisions had dwindled to the narrowest comfortable remainder when we came to Kantara on the last day. Short rations, a drop for a drink, had been our portion in the event of any undue delay.

X

THE DESERT ROAD

BEYOND El Arish, where the road departs from the shore, the desert is rolling and sparsely bushed; and here is a grewsome place: for (said the Soudanese as we rode) a youth of the town, returning from the sale of camels in Egypt, with the gold in his belt, had behind a near drift of sand been murdered by one whom he had befriended, a Bedouin of beyond the frontier, broken in fortune. There were, indeed, two, for they travelled three together, and the deed was accomplished by arrangement. "Save me!" cried the poor youth, staggering under the first blow of the sword, and ran confidently to this Bedouin; but the man employed his dagger in a way that may not be described, being most foul and gory, and the youth expired at his feet. And now, as we rode from this unhappy spot, we came upon a caravan of distinction: a man of some carriage, clad in silk, riding with two body-servants, a guard and a secretary, his baggage-camels trailing behind; and he wavered loosely on the back of his camel in a fashion most painful and weary.

"By God! friends," he groaned, "how far is it to El Arish?"

We told him four hours.

"Praise God!" said he; "for I have been tortured six days on the back of this beast."

I inquired of his errand.

"I am a judge," he answered, "come this distance from Egypt to try a cursed Bedouin for murder. Four hours to El Arish? Then, by God!"—more cheerfully—"we shall try the Bedouin this afternoon and hang him to-morrow."

Beyond the frontier the Bedouin might easily have bought himself free with stolen gold; but here was English jurisdiction.

Riding once, past noon, in a blistering glare, we came unexpectedly upon an old man, bent, lean, and gray, but trudging sturdily eastward, ankle deep in the sand, appearing a helpless figure in that inimical waste. He was afoot, alone, clad all in the rags of a pilgrim; and that he was piously inclined was speedily evident, for no sooner had he perceived our caravan than he removed from the road, spread his *abba* in haste, and knelt to recite the prayers, continuing to bow and patter until we halted abreast.

"Whither bound?" said I.

"To Mecca, *khawaja*, to perform the ceremonies. I am come from beyond Egypt, and am belated because of sickness."

"Have you no fear of starvation?"

"God is my sustenance, *khawaja*," he answered.

"Neither dread of wild beasts nor robbers?"

"God is my shield."

"Here is a lonely pilgrimage," said I, in pity.

"God is my companion, *khawaja*, and my comfort."

"But to die in this wild desert!"

"The will of God, *khawaja:* I am content."

We rode on, having stood, in pity, to watch the pious pilgrim turn a sand-drift, moving in haste above his strength; and presently—it may have been two hours—we encountered, in a gully, a red-bearded mighty man, not yet grown past his youth, who in this heat had stripped to his fluttering shirt: a morose and angry fellow (thought we), now sweating and out of breath, as with running. He, too, was in haste, it seemed—but wherefore was a mystery,—and heeded us with impatience; but we could not let him pass, for he had no *girbic* of water, nor any bread that we could see, and seemed to be travelling incontinently to a bitter death.

"Have you neither food nor water?" I demanded.

"Two hours gone," he answered, "did you not pass an old man much given to piety and praying?"

"Bearing an Egyptian water-bottle?"

"The bottle is from Algiers, whence am I; but the man is the same, may God reward him with hunger, thirst, and plague! For three days, *khawaja*, we travelled in friendship, and he shared all that I had,

having nothing himself; but this morning, when I awoke, he had stolen away, and I was deserted, thieved of my water and bread, and left to die."

We gave the man food and water, urging him the while to leniency.

"Your beneficence," said he, "has saved the life of that 'se friend; but still, by God! will I punish him."

He departed, running.

It seemed, sometimes, after noon, that the elder *khawaja* wished the day's riding over; and Mustafa, the camel-driver, wise and kindly man, would stride smilingly by his stirrup, in the way of some mediæval retainer. "I will tell the *khawaja* a most excellent and engaging story, to relieve his weariness, if he will but deign to listen," he would begin. Whereupon there would crowd near all the muleteers and chance followers of our fortunes; and an orderly caravan would all at once turn into a jostling company of mules, donkeys, camels, and horses, for the moment having the will of their abstracted riders. "There was once a Sultan," Mustafa related, I recall —and this was approaching Bir-el-Adb—"who commanded that there should be no occupation followed after sundown in his city. 'My city,' said he, 'shall be silent: I will have not so much as a whisper to disturb the sleep of my people.' And after that there was no sound—except a tapping: a mysterious tap-tap-tapping, which no servant of the Sultan could

locate or explain. But the Sultan commanded that the culprit should immediately be discovered, since it was his will, he said, to decapitate so flagrant an offender; and eventually a poor shoemaker was surprised at his labor, and forthwith haled before the Sultan, to answer to the accusation that he was the most disobedient subject in all the land.

"'Come!' cried the Sultan, in anger; 'is it true that you are a disobedient fellow, who must lose his head?'

"'It is true,' answered the poor shoemaker, 'that I have disobeyed your Majesty's command.'

"By this candor the Sultan was amazed. 'Then why,' he demanded, 'have you ventured your life in this unprofitable fashion?'

"'Alas!' cried the culprit, 'I must labor for the one by night and for the other by day.'

"The Sultan asked for an explanation.

"'I am the slave,' answered the shoemaker, 'of a robber and a creditor.'

"'What robber,' demanded the Sultan, 'has escaped my law, and what creditor is so cruel?'

"'The robber,' answered the shoemaker, 'is my daughter, who takes from me for clothing which she needs not; and the creditor,' said he, 'is my son, to whose future I am in grievous debt, since I have fathered him, and owe him, God knows, what he may achieve.'

"'Your daughter,' said the Sultan, pleased with the answer, 'I will give to a husband; your son I will

take into my service; and will you then continue to despite me?'

"'Nevermore,' answered the shoemaker."

I thanked Mustafa for the story.

"Labor in your service, *khawaja*," he answered, smiling, "is like rest."

These were tales, told in ancient fashion—as to the Canterbury pilgrims,—to relieve the tedium of travelling ahorse. And many a tale was told; but of all that the elder *khawaja* could give in return, none so delighted our followers as the tales of the camel-trader from Ain el-Kaum—that cunning rascal!—with whom I had fallen in at Damascus and concerning whom I shall now relate what befell.

XI

THE CAMEL-TRADER

IT was a fortunate encounter of a windy night at the khan of the camel-drivers — that with the camel-trader from Ain el-Kaum. Damascus was indoors—in the coffee-houses and khans and shuttered dwellings—or timidly abroad. Now were the nights before the pilgrimage; outcasts and thieves, come from the mountains and nearer deserts, lurked in the dark bazars, slinking in from the alleys. Apprentices, left to lock the stalls, belated artisans and shopkeepers, young sparks of the town, honest foot-passengers of every condition, made haste and wisely kept to the wall. Beyond the security and comfortable glow of the Sük Ali Pasha a woman was on her knees, in the darkness of the ass-market, wailing: "For God's sake, give me bread! The grain-merchants have stripped the poor, curse them! A *metallik*, men, for bread. In the name of God, give!" A fool with a *tabl*, beating on that little drum an accompaniment to a foolish song, ran joyously past. Two men, wrapped from the weather in great cloaks, came striding down, gigantic in the shadows, swords dragging. They paused by the beggar;

having cursed and belabored the dogs that troubled them, they went on. The woman was left alone again, still raising her doleful clamor.

Across the deserted square, in a bazar of the poor, a half-witted vendor of sheep's tails was huddled over a charcoal fire, patiently expecting late customers as a gift from God. The tatters of a rotted canopy swaying in the wind with a trailing vine shut out the clear light of the stars. It was here, but somewhat past the red light of the half-wit's fire, that the Interpreter stumbled over a litter of pups sound asleep in the refuse. Starting away from the yelp and growl, he unhappily chanced to tread on a crippled boy, who had curled up by the wall. We appeased the outcry; but to escape the confusion, which instantly began to gather, must dodge into a winding alley—a strip of velvet sky above, puddles of yesterday's rain underfoot; the walls high, blank, approaching overhead; the doors all shut and barred. Presently, as we went with caution over the slippery stones, a ragged *fellah* brushed past. There issued then from the khan of the camel-drivers a black Bedouin, his *kaffiyeh* and *agal* and *abba* all awry, who began to raise a great clamor at the heels of the *fellah*, beseeching him by God to return and be a witness to the truth of his contention, for he was being robbed by a camel-driver from Baghdad.

Led by these mischances, we followed to the stable-yard of the khan, incidents of a ragged, frowzy, gravely enwrapped group, in the midst of which the

fellah and the black Bedouin, disregarding the intrusion, had already occupied the camel-driver in a fashion amazingly noisy for the occasion of the dispute—the matter of a cracked coin. Here was a situation of much promise, as it seemed: a trade and a cracked *beshlik*, a *fellah*, a black Bedouin, and a camel-driver from Baghdad, fast approaching the point of explosion. They would presently take (I fancied) either to a savagely brutal stabbing or to some maidenly slapping—there was no telling which. But there was no climax of the sort; the keeper of the khan, inopportunely appearing at the moment—a one-eyed, hook-nosed man, lean to the bones—put an end to the dispute by ferociously ejecting the three and barring the door. What happened in the alley I do not know, for I was fortunately not ejected; but within, in the course of a lively discussion of the merits of the case, I made the engaging acquaintance of the pious camel-trader from Ain el-Kaum, with whom, shortly, I was not only drinking coffee in the crazy balcony above the stable-yard, but enjoying with him, as he recited it, the rare flavor of his rascality.

This was Abdullah.

"Listen, *khawaja*," said he, leaning into the candlelight, his lean brown face drawn with the intensity of his conviction, "and I will tell you this: Let the fool go to the ass for help in a camel trade. By the Prophet, there is no mercy! Camel for camel!"

he proceeded, tapping my sleeve with the henna-stained tip of a slender forefinger. "It is a sickness. By the Merciful! there is no cure once it takes you. I have known a man to give his sister to boot in trade for a black camel bred at El Jerisi; and I myself was tempted to leave Hassan, my son, as hostage for the payment of four hundred piastres I lacked in the trade for a Nejd beast on the Baghdad route. It was not required, God and the Prophet befriending, for the man was a fool; but I loved that camel, and the will was with me. I was then," he began, "seven days on the road from Baghdad, leading a lazy Turkestan beast, square as a box, haired like a he-goat of the Lebanon hills, with a neck like the Prophet's tree you may see in the Sûk es-Surûjiyeh. Not a hundred *rotels* on the beast's back, with Hassan, my son, a feather's weight more; and yet she groaned at the loading like a starved wood-carrier of the town. But, by the grace of God"—with a little shrug of resignation—"I came with my camel, with Hassan, my son, and with one hundred piastres in my pocket, to a camel-breeding tribe from the south, encamped by the road; and there—ah, *khawaja!*"

The table was tapped to demand attention.

"There, ah, *khawaja!*" sighed the trader, gently, with a reminiscent leer of delight, "I saw a camel that was better than my camel; and I loved that camel, and could go no step beyond it."

I asked for the story of the trade.

"God willing!" he answered.

In the silence some camel-driver of the pilgrims, half asleep on a heap of meal-bags in the stable-yard below, began to sing, imploring his blessed she-camel, in a lack-interest, nasal drawl, to remember the dewy grass beyond, and be strong on the march, that the tomb of the Prophet, the Holy Mosque itself, might surely be visited.

"A flea hop in his throat!" growled the trader.

The singer fell asleep.

XII

THE DEVICE OF ABDULLAH

"*KHAWAJA*," the story went on, "I was afflicted with admiration. It is the truth. I knew that I must devise a way of possessing the camel that was better than my camel, or perish, and I told the owner that I had fallen in love with the beast.

"'Come!' said I; 'let us trade. Your camel for mine, and I will pay the difference, for I love your camel more than my own.'

"'Love my wife, if you will,' he answered, 'but leave my dog and my camel, for I am a jealous man. Where *is* your camel?'

"Then I asked him:

"'By Allah! where is the profit in exhibiting my camel if you will not part with yours?'

"'By Allah!' said he, 'we should spend time like fools. Is your camel near at hand?'

"'It is no matter,' said I, 'for I have no mind to show her.'

"Then I led him to my camel.

"'It is a waste of time,' said he, 'to look twice at a beast from Turkestan.'

"But he examined my camel; and I observed,

THE CAMEL-TRADER LEANED AGAIN INTO THE CANDLE-LIGHT

khawaja, that he failed to discover a soft tendon in the left hind leg, and I was hopeful, for he seemed like a fool. But he scorned my camel, after all, asking what he should do with a hairy, northern-bred cow, which might climb mountains like a goat, but was not equal to a day's journey at midsummer in the desert. It was true, all that he said, and there was the soft tendon besides, in addition to an evil temper, and a gathering under the shoulder; but the words wounded me, and I knew then that I should have the man's camel, by the grace of God, if only to teach him the value of my own.

"I was humble, *khawaja*, and followed the man to his tent, praying that the favor of the Prophet might disclose a trick with which I could persuade him.

"'I am a compassionate man,' said he, 'and I will take pity. Give me your beast and five hundred piastres and the thing is done. By Allah, and Mohammed the Prophet of Allah! it is my last word.'

"'It is a reasonable demand,' I answered; 'but I have no more than one hundred piastres in the world. I will take your camel, leaving Hassan, my son, as security for the payment of the balance.'"

The camel-trader leaned again into the candlelight, his long arm at full length, his fingers stiffened in the Bedouin fashion: the whole figure tense.

"By the grace of God," said he, "the sacrifice was not required! *Khawaja*," he whispered, with a cunning droop of the eye and twitch of the lip,

"there is a proverb: Tie your dog or pay the stranger."

The application was obscure.

"*W'ellah!*" he continued, "it is the truth. Listen It is a law of the Bedouins that the dog which bites a stranger shall be killed. There is more: it is required that the owner of the dog shall reward the stranger for this mistreatment. Listen!" he proceeded, a little tremolo of joyous excitement in his voice. "By the grace of God, I observed that the owner of the camel that was better than my camel had been unwise with the dog that he loved; and I knew then that the trade was delivered into my hands, though I had but a hairy Turkestan beast by the halter and one hundred piastres in my pocket.

"'Hassan,' I said to my son, 'the Prophet is with us. Observe that the man's dog is loose. Take a lesson from what I do.'

"Then, *khawaja*, when the master's back was turned I insulted the dog with all my might, and the dog was unable to withstand the temptation of my person, which I had placed within his reach. I was sorely bitten in the leg, so that my *kamis* was torn and bloody; but this I bore with resignation by the power of the Prophet and of God, for the man's camel was mine.'

"'I would not take one thousand piastres for my dog,' cried he. 'Come!' he besought; 'conceal this thing from the sheik; give me one hundred piastres and your camel, and take my beast.'

"I answered:

"'It would leave me penniless.'

"'Camel for camel, then,' said he, 'and say no more.'

"I answered:

"'I am tired of walking.'

"'By Allah!' said he, 'I love my dog; take your camel and my camel and depart.'

"I answered:

"'It is true that you love your dog; but who will pay the thousand piastres the sheik will award me for the damage your dog has done?'

"'*Wellah!*' cried he, 'leave me at least the dust on my feet; take one hundred piastres and begone.'

"I answered:

"'I am a compassionate man; three hundred will be sufficient.'

"And I took two hundred piastres, *khawaja*, and his camel and my camel, and journeyed on toward Damascus, with Hassan, my son, who profited much by the experience."

The camel-trader laughed, with his little eyes puckered up, his lips drawn away, so that his long, yellow teeth shone in the candle-light.

MICROCOPY RESOLUTION TEST CHART

ANSI and ISO TEST CHART No. 2

1.0
1.1
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XIII

THE TALE OF THE NEEDLE AND THREAD

THIS camel-trading Abdullah from Ain el-Kaum, in the tales of whose rascality our followers on the desert road delighted—this spare, peering, cunning fellow in a brown *abba* falling from his shoulders in generous folds, with a *kaffiyeh* of white silk shadowing his face and kept in place with two ropes of camel's hair—this Bedouin had hands capable of an emotional performance amazing to behold. They were incredibly garrulous; there was no end to their running on; they were never at a loss; they chattered away with oily ease: creating no boredom, always entertaining and elegant and talkative to purpose.

They were slender, long-fingered, delicately formed and tinted hands, tipped with smooth little nails: showing no mark whatsoever, neither wrinkle nor stain, of what is elsewhere called work, though they had doubtless been honorably industrious on many a dark, halter-loosing, camel-thieving night. It was as though they existed in friendly independence of Abdullah—softly emerging from the sleeves of the *abba* when the outlook was threatening, flying into

violent action at critical moments. At any rate, they were never idle; they were continuously in attitudes, designed with instant and accurate genius to illustrate and impress.

The clever mockery of Abdullah's sister, who so fascinated the owner of a high-bred camel of the Israigan strain that an outrageous trade was perpetrated against him, was conveyed not so much by Abdullah's coquettish accent, by the flash of his eye, darting with deadly intention from the shadow of his *kaffiych*, as by the yielding, love-lorn despair with which his hand fell fluttering upon his heart, and there reposed, exhausted but ecstatic. Nor in the tale of the camel with the glass eyes, which he told before we left him, was his contempt for the poor beast expressed in any way so thoroughly as by the lift of that self-same hand, palm upward, bidding the thing begone from memory.

The hands were busy indeed in support of the tongue, until the tongue was through with the tale; and then they crept quietly back into the sleeves of the *abba*, leaving nothing in the candle-light but the trader's dark, black-bearded face, lean to the point of emaciation, delicately wrinkled about the little black eyes by past sunlight, the long, yellow, rat-like teeth now disclosed by a devilish sort of glee.

"*Khawaja*," said Abdullah, proceeding now to relate the experience of the needle and thread, "the

Bedouins have a proverb: I went to hunt and was hunted."

He laughed a little, reminiscently, as he accepted a cigarette, tapping my hand to indicate his readiness to kiss it, but wisely saving me the embarrassment.

"Listen!" said he. "By Allah!" he swore, according to his custom, "I speak the truth."

Abdullah's hands emerged from the seclusion of his sleeves to commend his words.

"Coming to Damascus with camels for sale to the pilgrims," said he, "as I am now come, but then from the north and now from the east, I met two camels at a village by the way, and loved them. I considered those camels," he continued, a finger touching my sleeve in a way of the faintest, but yet somehow more impressively than had the man gripped my wrist—"I considered those camels, saddled with new cloth, shaved and harnessed, standing in the city market three days before the pilgrimage, when camels are bought foolishly by the anxious, and I loved them more than ever. The owner was, by the grace of God, a fool, a wood-seller, who cut from the hills and sold by weight in the market, taking from the backs of his beasts. There is a proverb: A fool succeeds in his own house, not in trade; and the owner of the camels was a man of that sort.

"'But,' said this wood-seller, 'I need my two camels; how shall I carry wood to Damascus without them?'

"'It is true,' I answered, 'that you need your camels; let us not buy and sell, but trade, lest some

damage be done you. I have here,' said I, 'a splendid beast, with which I hesitate to part, but must, because I love your camels; and I will trade him, but not easily, because I loved him well before I came to this place and fell in love with your beasts.'

"'I will not trade two camels for one,' said he, 'even if the one is an ameer's *thelûl*, because one camel would make my business unprofitable. I am three days' journey from Damascus, and must have two camels or turn weaver.'

"'You are a wise man,' said I, 'and will certainly get the advantage of me; but still I will risk the loss, and trade with you, for admiration has overcome me. I will give you my camel,' said I, 'for the choice of your two, if you give me two hundred piastres to boot. If I did not love your camels like a fool I should not do it.'

"'I will never,' said he, 'give you two hundred piastres to boot; but you may take your choice, if you will, so that I may understand which of my camels is the better. I am a wood-cutter without two hundred piastres to my name, and I have but now taken my sister's sister-in-law and five children to keep, for the man was a fool, and permitted himself to be murdered by an enemy in Mesopotamia, and the murderer, by God! paid no more than an English pound to escape.'

"'Poor man!' said I; 'let me examine your camels, that you may know which is the better and which the worse.'"

XIV

CAMEL FOR CAMEL

ABDULLAH leaned toward me with an inquisitive, bantering little smile. "The *khawaja* is wise," said he, with a coquettish flirt of the hand; "let him answer me this: Did I tell the man the truth or a lie?"

"Of course," I answered, most heartily, "you lied like a thief!"

"Not so," he protested; "it was the truth."

"Wherefore?"

To express the amazement to which he had been moved by my simplicity, Abdullah, in the Bedouin fashion, put the thumb and forefinger of his right hand together, spreading the other fingers, and ejaculating "Tst, tst, tst!" slowly raised his hand, the while lifting his eyes to heaven. "But, indeed," said he, at last, "the *khawaja* is inexperienced in trade. I would that I might exchange camels with him as with the wood-cutter. I told the truth to mislead the man. No lie is so useful in trade as the truth appearing as a lie.

"'Trade the red camel,' I said; 'but if you know about camels, keep the black, for it is a rare beast.'

"And now, *khawaja*, as I had foreseen," Abdullah

continued, in a cunning whisper, "the man, being a fool in love with his cunning, thought I had lied; and he would not trade the red camel, which was the worse, but must part with the black, which was the camel of my heart's desire.

"'The red camel I love,' said he, 'but the black troubles me, and I will bargain with you. Come!' said he; 'lead me to your camels that we may make terms.'

"I thought the man a simpleton, and freely led him to my camels, suspecting no guile, but would not trade until a night had passed; and when he had departed, *khawaja*"—leaning close to impart the cleverness—"bearing in mind the future of Hassan, my son, I planned to lame the black camel that I loved."

The flare of the match with which Abdullah touched his cigarette illuminated a depth of self-satisfied cunning.

"That night," said he, "I thrust a needle in the sole of the black camel's foot, choosing the black from the red in the dark by my knowledge of the hind legs of both, for the red was knock-kneed—thrust the needle deep, *khawaja*, and closed and dusted the little hole, so that it could not be detected. The device was successful; in the morning the man's camel was lame; but so, by Allah! was mine. It is the truth, by God and Mohammed the Messenger of God! My camel was lame! When I called to him to rise I saw that he favored the left fore foot. Again and again, *khawaja*—down and up again; but always with the

same result; my camel had gone lame in the night, and was of no value to me, bound as I was to Damascus with camels for sale to the pilgrims.

"'Come!' I said to the owner of the black camel, 'let us bargain for your beast.'

"'It would indeed be poor bargaining,' he answered, 'for my camel has gone lame; but nevertheless I will trade a lame camel for a lame camel.'

"Then I knew that the man had lamed my camel, because he knew that my camel was lame; and I left him, and I discovered the thread which he had tied tightly about the left fore leg of my camel near the shoulder, and I cut the thread and rested the beast, and led him out to trade.

"'By Allah!' cried the man, when he saw my camel sound upon his feet, 'you have the evil eye, and have lamed my camel. I will hang a necklace of blue beads about his neck to cure him.'

"But on the third day, there being no virtue in the beads, he begged me in the name of God to trade with him, lest he be left with one camel to carry on an unprofitable business; and I traded, to save the man from turning weaver, and with Hassan, my son, I left that place on my way to Damascus, with two hundred piastres in my pocket and a new camel of price for sale to the pilgrims, which was restored when I drew the needle from his foot and washed the wound with a preparation which is my secret."

This much, for the present, of Abdullah from Ain el-Kaum.

XV

THE DUST OF MEN

NEAR by the well of Mazaar, to which we came, two days beyond El Arish, is a melancholy tomb, now in decay, tumbling, indeed, to the level of the sand which infinitely encompasses it. It is even deeply isolated in the midst of this far desolate place —itself in every part a waste and isolation. With the sun fallen behind gray clouds, the east thick with shadows, a sultry wind blowing up, the sand stirring uneasily, here is, indeed, a neighborhood of gloom and ghostly fears. The dome is broken, a wall is fallen down, the blocks are scattered and half-buried, sand has drifted in through the great gap, and the wind, entering at will, flutters the poor holy shreds which the fingers of the pious have knotted to upright sticks in the performance of some ceremony. Ruined, forsaken, and all, still one may fancy that once there dwelt at this tomb a devout keeper, thriving upon the gifts of pilgrims on the way to Mecca, dispensing charms and blessings in return: this long ago, when the road was populously travelled by the rich and truly pious—not by beggarly wanderers afoot, as to-day.

No Bedouin of these wide parts can name the ancient whose holiness is here commemorated and made valuable to the generation of this day.

"Long ago," they say, "there lived a virtuous man, rich in piety and good deeds, whose bones lie under this holy tomb, good company for the bones of us."

Here therefore the Bedouins have their graveyard.

There were many mean graves, all abandoned and graceless, it seemed at first, but yet affectionately marked with stones and little sticks—so many graves that walking westward I did not pass beyond them, nor could determine where was the remotest. I stumbled over a bone —no more than the thigh bone, happily, of some sick camel, deserted, which had wandered to this place and fallen to die. The sand, forever moving in response to the wind, had here gathered and had there departed: here twice covering, there exposing, the white bones of men. Upon the grave within the tomb were laid offerings of rags and beads and copper coins (the inhabitants of this dry desert being of the earth's most wretched); and I recall that two crossed sticks were set above it—a Christian symbol marvellously out of place, but left undisturbed! Sometimes the bereaved dug near the tomb to have the dead within the shadow of its sanctity, whatever bones must be disturbed; and safely near by was a new grave—that of a young girl, whose coarse blue gown lay there rotting in the

A CHRISTIAN SYMBOL MARVELLOUSLY OUT OF PLACE

weather, according to the custom, with such mean treasures as a scrap of pink ribbon—where got, God knows!—and a necklace of glass beads. The coins with which she had decorated her head-dress and employed in coquetry were still attached. I wondered that no ravenous beggar—of whom many wander past alone—had stolen them. There was, too, I recall, a little triangular charm against the evil eye and all diseases, which some holy man had written for pay and this dead girl had cherished.

"Here," said I, to Sheik Mirza, "is a great graveyard."

"Many men," he answered, "have died."

"It is a pitiful necessity," I ventured.

"It is the will of God," said he.

I watched the fingers of the wind take sand from beneath a heap of stones lying upon some grave in protection from the beasts. "Where," I asked, looking up, "are the souls of these men?"

"Each," he answered, "in its appointed place."

"According to the will of God?"

"Truly, *khawaja!*" he exclaimed, softly.

For this man were no mysteries whatsoever.

This Mirza was sheik of the wandering folk of all that district—a man honored and accounted wise. It seemed that his tribe had no venerated ancestor, as he told me with some little sign of shame, but was called the Tribe of Them That Had Heard, being in the first place gathered by accident from East and

West. I fancied, then, that the outcasts of Egypt and the Great Arabian Desert had fathered it—the poor and evil, who, having heard of this refuge, had ventured to it and remained. They possessed flocks and camels and some widely scattered groves of date-palm, but these not in abundance; and they were a lean tribe in every way—because, said they, of all the deserts in all the wide world no other was as sandy and dry and barren and unyielding as the desert of Et Tih, into the thirst and hunger and unwatered heat of which God had seen fit to cast them. The sheik was captain and judge over them, his wisdom the law; and of his cunning judgments Mustafa, the camel-driver from El Arish, told me much.

Once, said he, two men came to Sheik Mirza disputing.

"I am but now," said the one, "returned from Cairo. Before leaving I entrusted my money-box to the keeping of this false friend, who now denies receiving it; and as it contained my whole fortune, I am reduced to poverty."

"It may well be," said Sheik Mirza, "that you are mistaken. At what place did you give this man the money-box?"

Being informed of this, the sheik inquired of the accused whether or not he knew the spot.

"Truly not!" was the answer. "I have never heard of the place before."

"Go now to that place," said Sheik Mirza to the

accuser, "and ponder well. It may be that you will recall the name of the man to whom you really entrusted the money, for it seems to me that this poor fellow is innocent."

The man departed, leaving the accused in the presence of the sheik to await his return.

"It seems," said Sheik Mirza, impatiently, when an hour had passed, "that this man is gone a long time and is idly wasting my time."

"No," was the incautious reply; "he has not had time to reach the place and return."

"What!" cried the sheik, in anger. "Guilty man that you are, you remember the place where the money was entrusted to your care!"

Mustafa the camel-driver told me that the man made restitution, and was properly punished for his deception. It was much like a tale of the Wise Cadi of Al Bursah; but whatever the truth or entertaining mendacity of Mustafa the camel-driver, Sheik Mirza nevertheless delivers judgments in this wise, and of such are the disputes brought before him. Sometimes his wisdom is sought from beyond his tribe; and whether from within or without, he gains not only honor, but a percentage of the values involved, which is something worth being wise for.

Here, now, at any rate, was the wise Mirza, abstracted by the tomb of the forgotten holy man, with the graves of generations of his people underfoot and roundabout—the wind blowing from the hot,

unwatered, and uninhabitable desert to the south, the gruesome silence relieved by nothing but the unquiet moving of the sand, the sun falling from its veil of cloud and irradiating it with every gorgeous tint, flinging more tender colors over the rolling sand-hills to the remotest eastern sky. I observed that he was more decently clad than any Bedouin of our journey—a severe black gown, embroidered with black silk, gracefully fitting a small body, and disclosing, when it fell apart, a clean white *kamis* beneath. His *kaffiyeh* was white and fresh; it was thrown over his head, it appeared, with no intention to conceal his eyes, but fell even short of them—an unusual candor. He was young, black-bearded, having quick dark eyes, contemplative and not ashamed, and a delicate and religious cast of face: of a soft voice and way—melancholy and incurious and sadly patient, like the very desert that bred him.

Presently he looked up from a protruding bone which the sand was laboring to cover.

"The sand is restless," he sighed—seeming in this way to open a window of his soul. I was enlightened to look in.

We returned, then, to the tents; and here reflecting upon this melancholy tomb, I remembered the pious merchant of Damascus and the story of the Bones of the White Ass.

XVI

THE TOMB OF THE WHITE ASS

I MAY relate concerning the pious merchant and the tomb of the white ass that in Damascus the Interpreter and I, proceeding aimlessly in search of adventure, entered a narrow street, traversed by few, and there came upon a curious sight: an old man at his bath, taken in the open street; he was saving his modesty as best he could, to be sure, but was not abashed, nor did his strange employment create so much as a flutter of discomposure on the thoroughfare. Having turned into the silk-bazar, the Interpreter stopped to gossip with a merchant of embroideries, a sleek fellow, of pious inclination; but the piety of this man was as nothing compared with the devotion of his neighbor and competitor. He was a cadaverous object—a rusty, frayed old fellow with a long white beard and deep-sunken eyes—now squatting in his stall, quite detached from the affairs of the market, being occupied with a great book, over which he bent, swaying and muttering. A small apprentice, who had approached with cheery swagger, paused at the stall and extended his hand, which the pious old gentleman abstractedly tapped

three times, not losing a single syllable of his prayer, however, in the operation. Blessed in this wise, the lad went on his way, and was succeeded by another, and a third, and a diseased beggar, all of whom, in the space of three minutes, were tapped into an accession of piety, and went about their business, much benefited.

"He is a Mohammedan famed for his devotion," the Interpreter explained, as we walked away, "and his blessing is much sought. It is even said that the touch of his finger will work cures, and that as a writer of charms against evil he is not equalled in the city. For many years he has sat in that same stall, practising prayer and reading. He is a holy man, withdrawn from the world, and will doubtless have a holy tomb when he dies, where the pious may pray"

"It seems," said I, "that he will hardly thrive in the silk business."

The Interpreter laughed.

"The devout," I ventured, "are seldom thrifty."

"The recipients of his blessing," the Interpreter explained, softly, "are permitted to leave coins convenient to his hand."

From the bazar we passed into a winding street, very narrow, with grim old houses on either side, sometimes falling together at the eaves or frankly bulged overhead: so that on this dull day the way was dark and ghostly. In an aperture from the

street was an unkempt tomb; the branches of an ill-thriving bush protruded through the bars of a grating and were cluttered with many high-colored shreds of cloth, knotted tightly. "Here," said the Interpreter, "is the grave of some holy man of the city, whose name is doubtless forgotten, but whose piety lives in tradition, into which has entered, too, the protecting virtue of his tomb. The poor shreds upon this holy bush are the evidences of the vows and prayers of passers-by—of many travellers, perhaps (for we have come near a gate of the city), who have turned aside to this shrine to register their thankfulness. Indeed, the people are devout and most simple, accepting the reputations of these loudly pious folk without questioning, as the hermits and holy men of mediæval times were accepted, upon their own statement of their virtues; and they are in consequence often misled.

"There was once," he continued, "a young man, riding on a white ass, whose beast fell exhausted on a main-travelled road, and there instantly expired.

"'I will bury this unfaithful ass,' thought he, 'lest I get no sympathy from passing travellers, who will suppose that I have ridden him cruelly.'

"No sooner had he accomplished this than a benevolent man appeared and demanded to know the occasion of his grief.

"'My uncle,' replied the youth, 'an aged and most reverend man, being upon a pious pilgrimage be-

yond his strength, has here died by the wayside, and I have buried him.'

"'It is meet,' said the benevolent traveller, 'that a man of these holy accomplishments should have a tomb in keeping with his piety, and I will contribute my purse to this worthy end.'

"The traveller rode off upon his journey, informing all whom he met of the lamentable decease of this most holy pilgrim, and so fast and affectingly did the tale grow, so far did it spread, so rich were the gifts it elicited, that the youth was presently established in a splendid tomb over the grave of the humble white ass, where he began to grow stout and wealthy, thereby exciting the envy of a rival, who resided in the tomb of his grandfather, near by.

"'Come!' said this man; 'show me the sacred bones of your pious uncle, that I may understand their virtue.'

"'As we are of the same pious profession, brother,' replied the youth, 'and as it has occurred to me that we may profit together, I may tell you frankly that my holy bones are the bones of a white ass.'

"'Is it indeed so?' cried the other.

"'My conscience accuses me,' continued the youth, 'and I would gladly have you join with me, contributing the relics of your saintly grandfather to my establishment.'

"'Alas!' replied the other; 'though you have only the bones of a humble white ass, I have no bones at all!'"

XVII

THROUGH THE SALT SWAMP

MEANTIME they had made camp by the well. The rugs were spread ready on the sand by the *khawaja's* tent—the beloved Blue Rug and the Little Gem and that poor nondescript which the younger *khawaja* (having taken in haste) had contemptuously called the Dish Rag, but loved like a mongrel dog. These were of Damascus, hard sought, acquired with delight, familiar, much loved, making home of every desolate camping-place on the long road from Damascus to this gloomy well of Mazaar in Egypt: now lying on the creamy sand, with the low sunlight setting them aglow—beautiful in these circumstances as the sunset clouds beyond the ruined tomb, seeming, indeed, a soft reflection of their colors. Here sat we with the Sheik Mirza and the four elders of his tribe while the ceremonial three cups of coffee were drunk and the formal compliments exchanged.

They were encamped near by, it seemed—half an hour, an hour, who could tell? the distance was to be measured by the energy of a man and the urgency of his wish to be there. The tribesmen were off with the flocks to good pasturage; but the sheik remained,

in company with these wise elderly persons, to preserve order, to pass judgment, and the like, in the event of such unhappy need. A poor habitation, said he—a mean, impoverished housing and entertainment, a place unfit for the shoes of the distinguished to press, offensive to the eye and heart of any man, withholding to the stomach. Never before, indeed, said they, had a considerable sheik of Et Tih been reduced to a depth of squalor so repugnant to the high-born and wealthy as in this very instance.

Sheik Mirza, as I knew, would have been no polite Bedouin had he not defamed his own state and possessions.

"Come!" I yielded to this left-handed entreaty; "we will take coffee in your tent when the sun is gone down."

They held up their hands in admiration of this infinitely generous condescension.

"It is impossible!" cried they, revealing in this a flattering comprehension of the splendor to which the *khawaja* was accustomed; "it is impossible—the place is not worthy."

"Still," said I, firmly, "we will do it."

"The thing," Mirza protested, "would demean the *khawaja*."

I perceived in this a compliment to the *khawaja's* riches and power, and to the sweet and anxious luxury in which he customarily dwelt.

"Nevertheless," said I, doggedly, determined to

be as polite as the situation demanded, "we will ride out in the cool of the evening."

Sheik Mirza went off in a hostly perturbation needing no words to interpret; and so concerned were the elders that I was moved to pity their anxiety. It was, however, a departure wholly dignified; there had been no haste or blundering, no failure of manners, no lessening of self-respect, no hint of obsequiousness; the ancient forms had been observed in a fashion the most punctilious—soft phrases, significant and grateful, falling upon unaccustomed ears. I watched the little group move slowly over the sand—a grave departure, the young sheik leading, according to his degree, the elders respectfully following. They passed over the ridge of a great sand-drift with no fickle backward turning. I was impressed with the dignity and understanding and power of them in their own place. They were in perfect harmony, it seemed, with the desert into which they had vanished.

It had been the unhappy custom of our followers as we travelled these far and simple parts to misrepresent us in their own glorification; nor could I put a stop to it, whatever I might say. We exchanged greetings with whomsoever we met, and having passed the customary compliments, would then inquire concerning the travellers' degree and destination. Observing our stout caravan and opulently laden pack-mules, or coming upon our camp

at night, these native folk would satisfy their curiosity, which was indeed of a thirsty and intimate sort. We began modestly enough: at Hebron we were simple travellers, bound down to Egypt; but on the plains beyond Beersheba we had acquired a mysterious mission, having to do, I was amazed to learn, possibly with the betterment of all the Bedouin farmers thereabouts: this knowledge Aboosh, the Interpreter, gave me with much glee, having caught it from the lips of the big muleteer, who was speaking confidentially in the ear of a pilgrim. Having crossed the border into Egypt, we had climbed a rung higher, and by so much was the importance of our servants exaggerated: our mission was now a grave reality; we were in the confidence of the Egyptian government; it behooved all persons to honor and placate us--*khawaja*, men, and mules.

And now, here by the well of Mazaar, as the sheik went off, I turned curiously upon Aboosh.

"Look here!" said I, abruptly, "will you please tell me what is my station in life at the present moment?"

He laughed.

"Out with it!" I insisted.

"You are a high English judge," he replied, "travelling for pleasure and information."

"How high?" I asked.

"I think," he answered, gently, "that there is no more important in all England."

"By whom have I been exalted?"

"It was Corporal Ali, this time," said he. "He was a Prince in the Soudan before he enlisted. Doubtless he chooses to serve a distinguished master."

This was a Soudanese from El Arish, a sentinel and guide—a sharp-witted, English-trained soldier of the garrison, who blacked his legs, I used to fancy, with stove-polish every morning. It was a pleasant invention of his, founded, no doubt, upon our intimacy with the colonel; but I would have none of it. I commanded that Sheik Mirza should instantly be enlightened and relieved; and Ali was dispatched upon this mission, having been sworn by the beard of the Prophet to fulfil it righteously. Upon his return I was chagrined to learn that the rumor of our high station had not come to the ears of the sheik—who had thereupon naturally drawn his own conclusion that the rumor was true. An exalted judge, then, was I, the younger *khawaja* my secretary.

We rode out after sunset, Aboosh (the admirable dragoman) and the younger *khawaja* and I, with Rachid afoot—that ragged vagabond and poet of Jerusalem who had followed our camp from Beersheba.

"The *khawaja* will indulge me!" he begged "Here am I, poor Rachid, going down from Jerusalem into Egypt to see the world, riding upon his own poor, weary feet; and shall he then miss the sight of a very sheik of this wild desert in his black

tent of hair? Ah, but the *khawaja* will surely indulge his poor faithful poet and story-teller!" —and here was this beloved Rachid, striding ahead with the guide of Mirza.

The wind was gone down; the clouds were all vanished from the western sky; a clear twilight it was, still and colorless, with the first stars surely appearing in the round, velvet sky, and a full moon imminent under the horizon. We presently passed from deep sand to a salt swamp—a flat, dismal, reedy, stagnant expanse, foul in the midst of the clean desert. There were pools encrusted with a strange slime, not green and familiar, but of a crisp and ghastly white; and albeit the ground was hard underfoot, it was slippery and clammy and as treacherously given as the rotting ice of some disgusting pond. In the failing light, with night swiftly falling and the way uncertain, here was no grateful path, but a repulsive desolation of the world—a place of false water and horribly unnatural-appearing vegetation.

We followed Mirza's guide, who led carelessly, uplifted from his task, it seemed, by the engaging conversation of Rachid. The place was like a quicksand; disaster waited upon any deviation from the bewildering road; the progress was at best over a crust, with a grasping depth of salt mire beneath. The younger *khawaja's* camel broke through to his belly, and I made sure that a delicate leg would be broken; but for a moment the beast rested, awaiting,

it seemed, the worst of his situation: then with amazingly patient and intelligent caution he got to solid ground, grunting a bit, in a satisfied way, and gravely proceeded as though nothing had happened, giving the same impression of stupidity as before.

My horse floundered in the camel's wake; he plunged in alarm, continuing to cry and strive, and must be cleverly persuaded from his dangerous predicament. I recall that his terror had not passed, that he was trembling and uneasy, when I remounted, wet to the waist. We were glad to be away from this flat, salty swamp to the deep sand of the desert which we had heretofore cursed for its difficulty. It was not so greatly an escape from tedium and peril that gratified us, I think: it was the leaving behind—like a disgustful thing, come unexpected, forever done with—of a place horrible because of its treachery, not seeking, but repugnantly indifferent; because of its breathless and slimy stagnancy, fruitful only in unnaturalness.

XVIII

A SHEIK OF ET TIH

IT was grown dark; but the rim of the moon was appearing above the black and cloudy rolling outline of the desert — that sandy barren which for these ten days had been a distance whose hot horizon had yet to be achieved. There was a low hill, deep for the horses, a struggle to surmount; then a grove of date-palm, lying in a hollow, with moonlit places—a thin grove, springing from the sand, without a well or any blade of grass. Here was the habitation of the wise Sheik Mirza — a small, square enclosure, in the midst of the grove, walled with palm leaves skilfully woven. The women's quarters were near by, but yet did not intrude upon the masculine importance, so that the sheik dwelt aloof from his wives, in the way of the roosterish men of those parts, who will tolerate no lessening of the majesty of their sex.

Sheik Mirza's dwelling was partitioned in two; there was a guest-place by the gate, where the coffee fire was now glowing, and an inner sleeping-chamber: these all open to the sky, save that the couch was sheltered with a black cloth of goat's hair, and some

part of the outer room was roofed with a thatch of leaves. It was all swept clean against our coming. I was reminded of a child's play-house by the mud floor and tiny proportions; it seemed, I fancied, that some housewifely little maid had but now swept and put to rights. But this tender fancy was soon dispelled by the sight of Mirza's grave, dark face, bent over the coffee fire, which he was nursing to a blaze. We were then seated in a circle about the fire with the elders; and, presently, for our thirst was coffee, and for our hunger a bowl of crushed dates: whereupon we ate and drank and heavily smoked, and were for a long time silent.

No breath of wind was stirring; the palm leaves were listless and still, the sand inert, the whole world voiceless. Beyond the gate of the enclosure and the trunks and shadows of the grove the desert went white and vacant to the far-off rising yellow moon, with no vegetation to interrupt the misty sweep, nor any living thing to break the heavy-lying pause and silence Presently, turning from this languorous prospect, I put a shocking question to the sheik. It was direct and abrupt in the Western way, and impious. The man was startled and concerned; the elders of his tribe were troubled with suspicion—a mere flash of impoliteness, however, instantly controlled, but disclosing a very gulf of difference between these Arabs and our Western minds and ways.

"Do you believe in God?" I asked.

"Truly, *khawaja!*" Sheik Mirza answered, pityingly.

"There is but one God and Mohammed is His Prophet," the elders pattered, according to the form.

Some uneasiness still remained upon the little group, appearing mostly in restless, questioning glances exchanged; but the sheik was placidly regarding me, at any rate, and I proceeded, rudely, as before.

"Why?" I demanded.

Sheik Mirza mused. "God willing," he replied, gently, "I will answer your question: I look up at the stars."

It was a good answer.

I remembered what the sheik's tribesmen had said of their situation in this thirsty barren. "Come!" said I, boldly; "is this God a beneficent God?"

"Truly, *khawaja!*"

I caught in the answer some expression of pain. It was an amazed ejaculation, too, and might have been voiced in horror and resentment had the politeness of the sheik been less; but he was a mild man, and spoke gently, yet lifting his hands, involuntarily, in some anxious protest against blasphemy.

"Do your people go lean of hunger?" I asked.

"It is true," said he; "they die of hunger and thirst in this desert."

"Are there deformities among you?"

"Truly, *khawaja:* we have the blind and the im-

becile and the crippled, according to the will of God."

"Are men good or evil according as their fathers were?"

"It is indeed true in some cases."

"Listen!" said I.

"God willing," he responded, drawing nearer. "I will carefully listen."

"Are the poor oppressed?" I began, recollecting, as completely as might be at that moment, every woe of life I knew; "are the weak ravished? do mothers die in childbed? do sons despite their fathers? do youths love hopelessly? do children die by accident? is labor unrewarded and ambition thwarted? is there a merciless envy and greed in your tribe which will not yield to correction? are there not hands ready for the murder of the unwary and thievery from the unprotected? are not evil men triumphant among you and the virtuous ones victims of the vile?"—and here my poor catalogue of complaints came to its untimely and painful conclusion.

"These things," said Sheik Mirza, gravely, "happen by the will of God."

"Here, then, surely," said I, "is injustice."

"There is no injustice," he replied; "it is but a seeming."

"The tears," I protested, "are real enough!"

"Truly, *khawaja*," said he, gently.

"How, then," I demanded, to try him, "can you say that God is good?"

For a moment Sheik Mirza pondered heavily, stirring the dying coals of the coffee fire. "God willing," he replied, looking up at last, "I will answer your question: Lives there a man wiser than God who shall sit in judgment upon the acts of God?"

It was an excellent answer, I thought.

There ensued a brief catechism, and though we sat in a desert, guests of this Mohammedan, question and answer—the *Q.* and *A.* of the nearly forgotten book—seemed yet familiar. I began it, as a whim, in this way: "What," said I, "is the chief end of man?"

"To serve God, *khawaja.*"

"What ambition," I asked, "do you cherish?"

"To serve God."

"What most do you desire in all the world?"

"To serve God perfectly."

"What most do you fear?"

"To fail to serve Him."

"How shall a man best use his life?"

"In the service of God."

"How shall a man serve God?"

"If his life be an example of pious resignation."

"How," said I, "shall a man be happy in this world?"

"It is not hard, *khawaja;* if he live temperately, he will surely be happy."

"What good do you seek for your tribe?"

"God willing," he replied, quickly, "I will an-

swer your question: To have my people live at peace."

"And in prosperity?"

"It is the self-same thing," said he.

The sheik's young son came in, curiosity having got the better of his shyness at last; he sidled confidently to his father, and was there embraced (in the way of these Arab fathers). Presently he had snuggled close to his father's feet, and was become one of our company. I inquired, then, in a blundering way, concerning the boy's education: Would he be sent to the schools in Cairo?

"He was born here," was the answer.

"What matter?"

"He will, then, truly live here."

"It is the custom of the Western fathers," I ventured, "to advance their sons above themselves."

"How may this be done?" he asked.

"It is said," I replied, "that the education of the schools promotes it."

"If I send my son away to the schools," he answered, like a man who had pondered much upon the problem and become resolved, "I shall accomplish his ruin. If I send him away, he will either remain away or return; if he remain, he will be forever unhappy, having been born to the freedom of this airy desert; if he return, he will be forever unhappy also, having tasted indulgence, having been corrupted by the luxury of the city. Now, if I send my son away

to the schools, and if he remain away, he will either succeed or fail in life. But how, born in this desert, shall he succeed, being forever at a disadvantage in an alien place? If he succeed, what shall compensate him for the stress and confinement he must suffer? He must live in a room; but how shall he endure to live in a room? And if he fail, what then shall become of him? I will keep my son with his tribesmen in the sand, that he may be strong and courageous and free. Here we dwell content, cultivating our few dates, raising our flocks in peace, exchanging our poor wealth for the corn and cloth of other places, so satisfying all our simple needs. What shall a man want more than his freedom? We are oppressed neither by labor nor wicked men; and we live in our own place, according to the will of God."

"You are, then, content with the life you have lived?"

"It is so."

"And would live it over again, deed for deed, day by day, as you have lived it, since the beginning?"

"Truly, *khawaja!*"

My question had never before been answered in this way. I was amazed.

"What is the explanation of your contentment?" I demanded.

He looked up bewildered.

"Why," I repeated, "are you content?"

"God willing," he replied, enlightened, "I will answer your question: I live where I was born."

It seemed, after all, as we rode back, a good place to live. It was wide and clean and far remote from noise and strife and fervent wishing and any throng. Nothing clamored, nothing pressed, nothing suffered, nothing pursued, nor was there sight or sound of despair. Neither right nor wrong presented itself; there was neither wisdom nor folly in the world, no appeal, no demand, no contrary opinion, neither warning nor invitation. Fear was gone with hope; expectation had failed—there was no future beyond the casual glance ahead. And, to be sure, the desert was a beautiful and grateful place to ride in that night—a soft path, followed without haste or handling of the reins.

The moon was high, the farther heavens soft and deep and all alight with brilliant stars. We skirted the salt marsh, riding slowly and in silence through a perfect silence. A little wind blew up—no more than a cooling breeze, coming in puffs from the direction of the sea. They were long ago all gone to sleep in the camp; and when we were dismounted, when the horses and camel were tethered, when Aboosh was stowed away, when Rachid was snuggled beneath his rug, when the younger *khawaja* was stretched out to sleep, I walked apart, where was no glimpse of the tents. The wind was still blowing, but not risen—a gentle stirring of the night air: no more than

that. But the sand was moving: I listened, with my ear close—and I could hear the low swish of the grains.

To the remotest places of the wide white circle of the world the sand was moving.

"The sand is restless," I sighed, echoing the melancholy of Sheik Mirza.

XIX

THE CONTENTED MAN

WE moved early next day, as was our habit, bound now to Bir el-Abd (Well of the Slave). In the first hours we rode in silence, as always, sleep being still heavy upon us and the day not yet broken. I remembered the contentment of Sheik Mirza, and then I recalled a contented man of Damascus. I had come in from the street (I recall), where the wind was blowing wet and cold from the hills. Night was near come. It was already dark in the canopied bazars; the Long Street—by some still fancifully called Straight—was silent: all the little hammers idle, all the little apprentices gone off to bed. The parade and bargaining were over for the day; the stalls were shuttered, the shopkeepers shuffling home. A gloomy night, this; and by the dusk and vacancy of the streets was the wet wind made the more disheartening. In the great chamber of our dwelling, however, Shukri had the lamp alight and the fire crackling. It was all warm and softly aglow and familiar: made home to us by the rugs and tapestries we had gathered, and by the younger *khawaja's* vessels of brass and copper,

now reflecting the lamplight, each with its peculiar lustre.

The younger *khawaja* and that Taufik who served him were not yet returned. They had fallen, then (I fancied), upon some entertaining adventure—there was now no light abroad for the *khawaja's* canvas and colors. I drew the Blue Bokhara close to the fire and there lay down, listening to the chatter of the blaze and to the rain on the panes; and I was much moved, I recall, by the blind man's story of the Canoun and the Angel (which I shall presently relate), and wished that the uplifted mood might find expression in some deed. Upon this musing the younger *khawaja* burst in, as though escaping pursuit, his eyes at the widest, his cap askew on the back of his head, his cane waving in a frenzy of emotion; and I knew, knowing him, that some encounter of the queer streets we traversed had mightily stirred him.

"Awful!" he ejaculated, in his extravagant way. "I tell you it was fearful—terrible—horrible!"

It seems that the younger *khawaja* and Taufik, wandering home from a *khan* of the camel-drivers, had chosen the winding by-streets; and having come part way most deviously, had paused where two alleys met in a gloomy archway, whence a narrower lane, lying between high gray walls, led to a deep obscurity, promising no outlet. While they debated—the predicament appearing awkward in the gathering night—the younger *khawaja* chanced to

observe a glow of red-hot light in the shadows near by. It issued from the end of the lane, which terminated, as they now observed, in an underground chamber, to which it fell by way of a broken stairway of broad stones. Presently within, the younger *khawaja* discovered himself below one of the baths of the city, from the heating furnace of which proceeded that hot and varying glow which had attracted him.

Here was an old man—as instantly appeared from the quality of his voice, being lifted timidly to demand what presence had disturbed him—an old, old man, lying outstretched on his belly upon a heap of chopped straw at the little round mouth of the furnace, which was no more than a hole in the wall. He was employed, it seemed, in thrusting the straw through the aperture, a handful at a time, so that it fell, a continuous stream, upon the fire below. There was no one else about: the old man was lying quite alone in the dark, which was hot and dusty and most foul to smell.

"It is a wretched labor," said the younger *khawaja*.

"Not so," answered the old man; "it is a labor for which I thank God, since, though I am old, I am not yet turned beggar."

The *khawaja* would know the reward.

"Sufficient to my small need," was the reply.

"xpence a day!

"Have you no helper?"

"There are little children hereabout, who play at pushing straw through the hole; and they give me rest in the day, sometimes."

"What!" cried the *khawaja*, "you labor by night and by day?"

"Truly, *khawaja*, with much thankfulness to God for the opportunity. I must be diligent lest trouble befall me."

"What trouble menaces?" asked the *khawaja*.

"The keeper of the baths," was the answer, "might turn me off."

"Have you no sleep at all?"

"When the fire is hot," said the old man, "I may sleep a little; and sometimes I forget myself and sleep against my will."

"How long," demanded the *khawaja*, "have you lain here?"

"Since before I went blind of this dust."

"The number of these years?"

"God has privileged me with the favor of the bath-keeper for these eight years."

"Friend," inquired the *khawaja*, amazed, "do you dwell content with your lot?"

"Thanks be to God!" the old man replied.

The younger *khawaja* gave the old man a gold piece, and must then all at once take to his heels to escape that agony of gratitude.

"Come!" I said, when the younger *khawaja* had related his adventure; "we have this day both been

fortunate: I have been delighted with a story, and you have done a deed."

"Tell me the story," said he.

"I will tell the story," I answered, "if you will share the deed."

To this he assented: and I told him the story of the angel and the *canoun* and the little blind Musa who had wandered the streets beseeching.

XX

THE CANOUN AND THE ANGEL

IT was in Damascus that I heard the story, and ... on a drear day: now had come a cold wind upon the city—November weather, blowing from the Lebanon hills, where, by all travellers' tales, snow had deeply fallen. It was raining in gusty showers from a low gray sky: the town was drenched and splashed and shivering—the canopies leaking, the ragged trees adrip, the streets sluggish rivers of mud. From the balcony window the prospect was mean enough: disheartened dogs, droves of bespattered donkeys, camels treading the slippery places with slow caution, dripping beggars, wayfarers in from the soggy plains, merchants of the town with faces screwed, scowling Bedouins, dull *fellaheen*—every man wrapped tight in his cloak, of fur, sheep-skin, or rags, according to the dealings of fortune.

I observed a mangy dog venture from the lee of the wall, stand three-footed and cowering in a pool of mud, and return presently to cuddle with his mates. A drove of fat-tailed sheep crossed the river on the way to market, driven by three distracted children, who must gather the flock from an unfortunate col-

lision of a company of donkeys with a string of wood-carrying camels and a saucy old man on the back of a white ass. A sheik of the Bedouins came, arrived from some distant place, having entered by God's Gate, now riding proudly, his robe and *kaffiyeh* fluttering in the wet wind, three servants respectfully following, all armed to the teeth, sword, dagger, and long gun: an alert and travel-stained cavalcade, not used yet to the security of the town.

A trumpet was blown, but in no spirited way; an outrider galloped past, and the Vali drove by, with an escort of starved and listless soldiery, brushed up, indeed, for this service, but still somehow not differing from the ragged, anæmic crew who go utterly impoverished in the Sultan's service. Some pious Mohammedan, favored by fortune, appeared with a long stick, a bag, and a ma... servant: he would feed the dogs, I knew, in fulfilment of a vow, and I surmised, I recall, that his son's life had been saved, since I could conceive no other thankfulness sufficient to move a Mohammedan of Damascus to the deed, the day being wet and cold. He exchanged with his servant the stick for the bag. "Whish! whish! whish!" they called. The dogs charged—a famished snapping swarm—and must be beaten to their distance.

I dispatched Taufik to discover the cause of the man's gratitude.

"This man," he reported, returning, "has but now sold his beast to advantage in the ass-market."

There was a tap at the door—a diffident tap, insinuating and apologetic, almost subservient, but escaping that. It was the hand of the Interpreter—a gray little philosopher, of the cultured Christian class, accomplished, clever, and kindly, and of an amazingly impeccable politeness—who approached the balcony window with many low bows and complimentary speeches. It was with difficulty, indeed, that I had persuaded him to serve me. "I observe," said he, "that you are interested in this Mohammedan's piety, which is not, however, as interesting as the dogs. It is a curious thing about the dogs of Damascus that each must dwell in the quarter of his birth; but yet, as I have many times observed, a dog may wander from his place, going in peace, if he may accomplish an arrangement with the neighboring packs, and will but proceed amicably, and under escort from frontier to frontier. It is in much the same way that the wild Bedouins travel the desert. The Mohammedan," he proceeded, "has sold his beast? Very well, then: I understand. This good man has robbed the purchaser in much more than he had hoped, and will now not only pacify the Recording Angel, but cultivate the favor of Heaven, by returning to the Almighty some part of the profit of his deceit. To-night he will sleep with a lighter conscience and a heavier purse; and to-morrow he will rise refreshed, sustained by his religion, to seek another victim."

I had elsewhere heard something of this same practice.

"Come!" said the Interpreter, as the pious Mohammedan trader departed; "we will visit the poet."

I would not call upon the poet.

"But," he protested, "he is wise and learned, the greatest poet in all Syria, and—a—rich—man!"

Thereupon we set out for the home of the poet.

As we walked, the Interpreter told me something of interest concerning a great traveller—that one considerable traveller of the great Arabian Desert of whose account good words are spoken in Damascus. It seems that he was taught Arabic by the Interpreter, living one year with him, not only learning the language, but teaching his stomach to endure for many days upon dates, for example, or go hungry, and his whole body to go thirsty. "You do not believe in Christ, dear friend, nor yet in the Prophet," said the Interpreter; "what, then, is your religion?" "I am an infidel," was the answer; "there is no God in whom I believe." "Is an infidel of this character?" exclaimed the Interpreter. "An infidel," was the reply, "is a man who believes in no God, neither cares for the wrath nor mercy of any." But now, curiously, when this man was ready to depart upon his journey, he came to the Interpreter, with a ring upon his hand, his seal, as men who go into the desert should have. "What!" cried the Interpreter, in amazement, when he had read the inscription; "you call yourself 'Khalil,' which is 'A friend'? It is a Christian name, and will instantly declare you a Nasrany, to your imminent peril in these far places.

As you are an infidel, believing in no God, why not take a Mohammedan name, Mohammed, Ahmed, or Mustafa, and in this way ease your path?"

"This," the traveller answered, "I will not do."

"Why not?" the Interpreter insisted. "You are an infidel, believing in no God, and should have no compunction."

"Because," replied the traveller.

"It is no answer," said the Interpreter.

"I will not do this thing," the traveller declared, "because of the God of my fathers. I was born as I am born, of Christian parents, in a Christian land, a land of brotherly kindness and beneficent law because of Christianity; and I will journey as a Christian or die a martyr."

In the wild desert, where in the accomplishment of his death some man might have won merit, the Bedouins often said to this traveller, "Say but this, 'There is but one God, and Mohammed is His Prophet,' and your life will be spared." The traveller would not; but after three years, nevertheless, he emerged. I do not know whether he is an infidel now or not. At any rate, he is no Mohammedan.

We had come now, by a way most devious and dirty, to the home of the poet: a great, pretentious place, no doubt, but situate in a wretched quarter, and, except for a gorgeously clad porter at the little gate, and a long blank wall broken too severely by

WE HAD COME BY A DEVIOUS WAY TO THE HOME OF THE POET

the latticed windows of the harem, hardly distinguishable from its meaner neighbors.

"Here," I complained, "is an intrusion."

"It is not so," replied the Interpreter, earnestly. "No personage of Damascus would deny a stranger of station. You must seek his *dîwan*. It is the custom. There is no other way. Would you have him call upon *you?*"

"The adventure is yours," I assented.

I recall a spacious entry—heavy stone arches overhead, a mosaic floor, new washed—and a black man in white linen, scarred in the cheeks, like a slave come to Damascus from the Soudan by way of the desert tents. There was a miniature garden, a high-walled court-yard, with close-cropped hedges and mollycoddled flowers; this was an agreeable glimpse, high colored and wet with rain—a fresh, sweet-smelling patch, fallen upon from the evil-odored street. Happily, as it seemed to me—but much to the chagrin of the Interpreter—the poet was gone out: departed (said they who loitered awaiting him) to talk with some celebrated theologian, arrived unexpectedly from the East. There was a sheik of learning, however, distributing flowers of wisdom in an anteroom, whom I observed with much interest, since I had never seen the like of it before. The Interpreter explained that he was a famous theologian, whose learning was much sought because of its heterodoxy, which, however, had not yet transgressed the limits of his personal security. Thus

far he had walked the maze with clever feet; but there would come a time when some indiscretion would not only accomplish his ruin, but involve his poor students in the downfall. It was the custom of this man, it seemed, to use the homes of the great, having no considerable establishment of his own. He would repair here or there, according to the whim of the morning, and, discovered by his pupils, would impart instruction or not, as his humor went. It was apparent, indeed, that he was esteemed as a teacher. Now elegantly at ease on a cushioned *dîwan*, he was surrounded by a group of hero-worshipping listeners, squatted at his feet, the favored reclining beside him — mostly boys with small-grown beards, who buzzed at the flame of this dangerous learning, every youth of them all doubtless even then under espionage.

"It is well known," said the Interpreter, impatiently, as we departed, "that the man is under suspicion. I cannot conceive why these poor youths should follow him. They follow, indeed, to a great catastrophe."

"Wherefore?" I demanded.

"In Damascus," he answered, absently, "it is wise to be circumspect."

"What peril," I asked, "can threaten these half-grown boys?"

"The peril," he answered, "that waits upon new teaching."

"The man's teaching," I objected, "is not political."

"Every new thing," he answered, "is political."

I remembered the enterprising gentleman of Beirut who had indiscreetly telegraphed in English to London for an engine of eighty revolutions a minute. Eighty revolutions a minute! The censors at Constantinople were shocked; the indiscreet citizen was cast into prison.

XXI

THE CANOUN AND THE ANGEL—(*Continued*)

WE passed the Gate of St. Thomas—crowding through the damp and scowling swarm—and climbed a deserted by-street much in need of an industrious scavenger, whence, by way of a low, arched passage, we emerged abruptly into a broader thoroughfare, streaming with sullen pedestrians and dripping donkeys. Presently the Interpreter stopped under the latticed balcony of a mean-appearing house and knocked loudly on the door.

"Here lives," said he, while we waited, "a blind musician, Musa Halim, a player upon the *oud* and *canoun*, who thrives much better than most musicians of Damascus, being a gentle and respectable person. There is a curious story in connection with him, for which I can vouch, having had it from my mother, to whom it was well known. The man is a foundling, though he is not himself aware of his origin, but conceives himself to be the true son of his foster-mother, who is now long dead. He was picked up in the street by a childless woman, by whom he was much loved until she discovered that he was blind; and after that she cared no more for him, but reared him, as in duty bound."

MUSA HALIM THE BLIND MUSICIAN

At this point the door was opened, and we were with much politeness ushered into a small court-yard where the interlacing branches of the lemon-trees dripped like rain. A wooden stair led thence to a room overlooking the street, where sat the blind musician idly strumming a great corpulent *oud*. He was old and clad according to his station, in a cotton gown—a gentle, patient-faced man, quick to smile in a child-like way, so that, beholding him, one's heart was tenderly enlisted. I fancied that he was shy and kind, given much to loving those upon whom he depended; and this, indeed, the Interpreter said was true.

Musa played presently; and I listened, engaged but not comprehending, until the light began to fail in the little room. And as he played, he talked with the Interpreter—at last putting aside the *oud*, and curiously gesturing, smiling wistfully, too.

"It is a pretty story of his childhood," said the Interpreter, when Musa had fallen silent. "I will tell it to you."

I heard then the story of the *canoun** and the angel, which pleased me very much.

"Long ago," the Interpreter began, "when this old Musa was a little child, his mother was unkindly disposed toward him because he was blind.

"'What is the use of a blind boy who must forever consume, but contribute nothing?' she would say.

* A stringed instrument resembling a zither.

'I had rather have a seeing girl than a blind boy,' said she; 'and I had rather have neither than either.'

"Day by day the little Musa must listen to these complaints, and though he was wounded sorely, as he says, he would neither curse God because of his affliction nor answer his mother in anger, believing always in the wisdom of God.

"'When I am grown,' he would reply, 'I will find a work for the blind to do.'

"'There are the blind and the blind,' said she, 'and you are of the blind who are blind indeed. Is it so that I am to serve you all my life and gain no smallest service in return?'

"'No,' answered Musa; 'the good God who created me, leaving me blind, will yet give me some labor that a blind boy may do.'

"To escape his mother's wailing he would then go into the street, where he must feel his way along the walls, being careful to avoid the teeth and hoofs of the beasts of the city, but not fearing the men of Damascus, who are tender to the afflicted, according to the teachings of their religion. First a step or more; then beyond, eventually to the corner, and at last into the Long Bazar, where he made friends, and would often sit in the shop of a fez-presser, who cherished him.

"'I have a brother-in-law whose wife is the daughter of a silk-weaver,' said his mother, 'and to this man I will apprentice you, for surely you have strength to turn the wheel.'

"In this way the blind Musa came to turn the great wheel of the silk-weaver; but he was yet young for the employment, and the weavers of that bazar pitied him.

"'Here,' said they, 'you turn the great wheel industriously, but you have no strength; every eight minutes you must rest—the labor is too hard. Turn the lathe of a carpenter; it is your proper occupation.'

"The lathe of a carpenter, then, the little Musa turned, but blundered unhappily, because he would think of other things.

"'At any rate,' thought he, 'this carpenter should turn his own lathe; this maker of chairs has no need of a blind child; for has he not his teeth and the toes of his left foot? Why should I serve a man who is too lazy to employ all the members God has given him? I will go to the brass-worker; it is surely my place.'

"In the shop of the brass-worker Musa diligently turned the wheel, laboring from early morning until at sunset the shutters were put up and all the artisans went home. The apprentices of the bazars are happy indeed, living the lives of their peculiar labor, hearing the gossip of it, hopeful of rising to mastership, and, best of all, looking up from the task to watch the life of the city passing by; but for this blind Musa was no distraction, neither opportunity. It chanced one day, however, that a fragment of metal, flying out, wounded him in the forehead, and he must give up that occupation, too.

"'What now,' his mother complained, 'shall I do with a blind child like this?'

"Musa walked out, feeling his way along the walls, careful of the hoofs and teeth of the donkeys and camels, and came presently near the corner of the Long Bazar, where, strangely, he was arrested by sweet tinkling sounds. These he had never heard before—no music, as he has told me: neither *oud* nor *canoun*. He stood against the wall below the window whence issued the attractive sounds—withdrawn from the jostling and complaint and pity of the street. Soon, enraptured, he issued from this seclusion, and caught a passer-by by the robe.

"'What is this?' he demanded.

"'It is a *canoun*,' was the answer; and thereupon the man explained the manner of its playing and all the business of music.

"'It is evident,' thought Musa, 'that God has led me to this place and entranced me. Surely, the God who made me to be born blind had the intention of succoring me, and having led me to this accident, wishes that I should continue, not a turner of wheels, but a giver of delight.'

"Musa's mother would hear nothing of this plan. 'What!' cried she; 'a *canoun* indeed! Shall we give a bear silk to weave?'

"Always was this answer, 'Shall we give a bear silk to weave?' Night and day the same: 'Shall we give a bear silk to weave? Shall we give a bear silk to weave?' until Musa sought no more.

THE SHOP OF THE FLOWER-SELLER

"'But,' thought he, 'I will ask God to send an angel with a *canoun*, and in this way I will surely gain my wish.'

"This he did, night and morning, and often during the day, beseeching that an angel might be sent with a *canoun;* but no angel came, pray as hard as he might. It became his habit, then, when in the street, to pause, absent-minded, and strum the palm of his left hand with the fingers of his right; and this curious occupation never failed to attract attention.

"'Blind boy,' they would ask, 'why do you this queer thing?'

"'I play on my little *canoun*,' he answered; 'it is my little *canoun*, and I play.'

"Always he would answer in the same words, strumming the palm of his left hand, 'I play on my little *canoun*.'

"One day a lady laughed close at hand.

"'Little boy,' she asked, 'what are you doing?'

"'I play,' Musa answered, 'on my little *canoun*.'

"'But here,' said she, 'is no *canoun!*'

"'It is true, lady,' he answered; 'but having no *canoun*, I must pretend to possess one.'

"The lady laughed then, and went away; and Musa idled on, but, returning, was intercepted by a boy of his neighborhood, who said:

"'Make haste; there is a surprise in store for you.'

"At the corner of the Long Bazar they said:

"'Go faster; you will be much pleased with what you find at home.'

"Believing, then, that the angel had come, Musa hastened; and at home, indeed, he found his first *canoun*.

"'An angel,' said he, 'has brought it!"

It was this tale I exchanged with the younger *khawaja* in return for sharing with me the good deed he had done upon the pitiable estate of the contented man of Damascus, to whom Shiek Mirza's responses had recalled me by the Well of Mazaar, in Egypt.

XXII

AT THE WELL OF THE SLAVE

"THE Arabs," said the admirable Aboosh, spurring the gray horse nearer, on the road to Bir el-Abd, "have a proverb: A journey is as long as the looking forward of him who would be at his destination."

Herein, to be sure, was expressed the wise patience of the desert: a man is as weary as he is wishful to be done with all travelling. But it had been hard riding that day for aliens—a broiling footpace through the sands of Et-Tih—continued, with urging, since the cool wind of dawn had fallen flat. Moreover, experience tempers all hardship: who is inured has no feeling.

"It is true, as they say," I answered, "that a complaining man curdles all good cheer; but the Arabs," said I, quoting a proverb I had heard in Damascus, "have another wise saying: He who receives the strokes is not like him who counts them."

"Patience," he quoted, promptly, "is from God."

I was able to retort.

"Patience, as the Arabs say," I answered, "is the expedient of the man who has no expedient."

The dragoman laughed.

"There is yet," said he, diffidently, "another proverb: A gloomy look is a foreboding of ill, and a bright face is like good news."

It seems that the desert philosophy, current in these proverbs, is, at all times and without complaint, to make the best of necessity. I made haste to practise it.

Still was it hard riding; nor, search the rolling yellow waste as we would, was there any promise of an end. In the beginning—this at the gloomy Well of Mazaar—a camel-herder of those parts had at our mounting said six leisurely hours to Bir el-Abd; but he had proved a poor sanguine liar—a fellow irresponsible, like a child prevaricating to please. We were now well forward in the ninth hour; and a ragged pilgrim from Tunis, bound east and yet within sight, had foretold three more hours to water, whence he had come. There was a journey of ordinary most agreeable; but the resources of distraction were now exhausted: Mustafa, the camel-driver, was squeezed dry of his excellent and engaging tales, and must, said he, search his memory in sleep, to continue; the love-songs of Rachid had failed, and he was become an unfeeling machine, trudging ahead, loins girt, a distraught and most weary poet; the younger *khawaja* and Taufik, the one bobbing on a tall *thelûl*, the other lazily astride a nervous, raw-mouthed pony, had tired of toss-and-catch, even as Hamed, the

muleteers' boy, had grown out of sorts with recovering the balls they muffed. Only Ali, the Soudanese, of all our company—and he was desert born—kept himself detached from travelling, and crooned, lagging behind, the graces of his beloved, her lips and bosom and eyes, which were not to be matched, it seemed, in all the wide world.

To the crest of a hill and to the crest of a hill; beyond a valley and to a far-off ridge: this had been our riding the day long; and now I fancied that we must forever continue to crawl toward a retreating horizon, like children chasing the rainbow. The sun was falling behind a vast church-window of cloud: a gorgeous coloring, streaming in straight lines, of every pale hue, from a gory horizon to the sombre higher sky, the whole reflected in the tender glory of the east. I recall that in the midst of the western fire was a glowing blood-red field, infinitely extending, seeming not to roof the farther sand, but to lead from it, as by a gentle incline, to the remotest places of the heavenly light, as though one might mount from the parched desert and continue riding, uplifted, in some supernal country. Then, as always at evening, the sand was carpeted with ethereal rainbow hues: a billowy prospect, wide as the sea—the color subtle and evanescent; no sooner perceived than vanished. Well, the pilgrim from Tunis, too, it seemed, had lied—but yet without offence to us: these travelling folk, on the old road from Cairo to the East, care nothing; they do but proceed, east to

west, west to east, taking no account of time or suffering. We came presently to the crest of a hill — like any sandy drift we had hopefully surmounted that day—and at our very feet, all unexpectedly, lay Bir el-Abd, the Well of the Slave, a grove of tall date-palms growing in a round depression, the well-shaft rising from a circle of anciently trampled sand.

Alone in this vast waste and silence was a ragged Bedouin, filling his *girbie* at the well; and him we interrogated.

"Whither bound, *khalil?*" I inquired.

The answer was in a dry-lipped whisper.

"I have done no wrong, *khawaja*," said he.

"We have not come to accuse you, God knows!" said I.

"God witness!" he protested, "I am an innocent man. I have not wronged the English."

"Even so," I replied; "but is your errand on this road so secret that it may not be known?"

"*Wellah!*" he swore, "I am but an humble Bedouin of these parts, and love the English."

"Whither bound, *khalil?*"

"Bearing a burden of flour, by the grace of God! four hours hence afoot," he answered, "to the camel-herders of our tribe, who will perish if I am taken."

"It has grown dark," said I; "to-night you will eat and rest with us, who have and to spare."

"The *khawaja* is beneficent," he answered; "but the tribesmen are hungry."

A RAGGED BEDOUIN FILLING HIS GIRBIE AT THE WELL

"At dawn," I urged, "to your burden of flour you shall add a gift of rice and tobacco."

Elias, the cook's boy—an impish Christian of the city, having the contempt of the town for these desert-dwellers—was now seized of a devilish impulse; he wheeled his pony and came charging upon the wretched Bedouin.

"There he is!" he screamed. "That's the man we're after!"

The Bedouin took to his heels. A ragged *abba* flapping like a whipped flag, and he was over the hill before the gray pony had recovered from her astonishment. We choked the laughter of Elias—it was the hand of the admirable Aboosh—and gravely chastised him. He had scared a man from the well, who might not then, God knows! have filled his *girbie*. There was no forgiveness; every howl of his was like the music of Damascus. Satisfied of punishment, we dispatched the boy after the Bedouin, commanding him to return with his captive or himself miserably perish in the wild desert like a forsaken camel, leaving his carcass to be picked by vultures and his bones to bleach in the sun and frighten wayfaring mules. Fortunately, he took us seriously; and he was presently returned with the man, whom he had overcome with a bribe, he ruefully said, of the only *bishlik* that he had.

XXIII

THE BLACK BEDOUIN

WHEN the cook had worked the evening miracle of a table spread bountifully in the wilderness —this same dry waste being the region wherein for forty years the children of Israel had received the manna of Heaven—I wandered apart. It was a tender night, the dark gently fallen upon us, like a soft blanket thrown over in loving wisdom by a mother. The little stars were out—a great, clear-shining, friendly multitude—peopling the wide desert itself, so that no wanderer might justly cry himself forsaken therein; and a young moon, a greater glory in the midst of these dear constant lights, had now spread the infinite sands with a mystical sheen. Here was the frontier of reality; beyond the drawn breath and whispering and all finite expression of the camp—the whine of Hamed, who must forsake the rice-bowl to beat the gray mare from her mischief —a mere step beyond, and the meaning was all at once departed from familiar conceptions; a mere step —an inch beyond the hill—and of this earth the uttermost remoteness from all besieging perturbations had been attained. No voice was lifted in our

camp: men spoke almost in whispers, as always, at night, in the desert—a harsh cry there, it seemed, impossible. The muleteers were grouped squatting about a great tray of rice by the cook's fire, each man reaching his hand at will; the younger *khawaja* had gone off to smoke to his camel, and I observed now that he was squatted on the sand, idly puffing, and that his grateful beast, inhaling each whiff, would stretch his neck for further treating; the camel-boys were baking their bread at a little fire set somewhere away from the camp, for they counted themselves, it seemed, the least among us.

"Ahmed, take care!" Mustafa whispered, in sharp warning. "The *khawaja* is come to observe us."

It seemed that Ahmed's hand slipped.

"*Wellah!*" groaned the scandalized Mustafa; "but you will surely yet put us to shame."

I watched the small Ahmed—a ragged little urchin—knead the flour and water and fashion a great round flat cake of the dough. They scattered the embers of the fire with little sticks, and the boy deftly deposited his handiwork on the black sand: whereupon they covered it with coals. Presently it must be turned; and in this process—Ahmed being now made nervous by Mustafa's interminably reiterated warnings—the cake was let fall. They were much afraid, I knew—all these desert folk—of being made ridiculous in the eyes of strangers; but I was now fairly shocked by the outburst of the mild and engaging Mustafa: he fetched the boy a hearty buffet

—a quick, cruel blow—and employed his tongue in severer punishment.

"Why does he take this so to heart?" I asked.

"He says," Aboosh answered, "that the boy has dishonored them forever."

"Wherein the dishonor?"

"In that, when you return to your people, you will say to the whole world that Mustafa, the camel-driver of El Arish, eats badly baked bread."

When, however, the embers were raked again from the cake, when the ashes and clinging sand were dusted away with the ragged tail of Ahmed's *abba*, it turned out to be very good bread indeed, relished by Mustafa and all who ate as if there had been no slip of the hand at any stage of the operation; and I think that the little Ahmed did well enough—well enough, you may believe, in that mean light, half blind as he was, of what they call the Egyptian eye disease. At any rate, I do not hesitate to proclaim that Mustafa, the camel-driver of El Arish, does not eat ill-made bread, but in every respect good bread, made by the hands of Ahmed, his small relative.

Hamed and Rachid had by this time gathered a great store of dry bushes for the camp-fire, which must burn long that night; for, riding in weariness, we had at midday promised ourselves a protracted recreation. The little blaze was now reaching slender arms for the stars; and presently, disposed around it, muleteers, camel-drivers, and all, each according to his station, we dispatched Rachid for

the coffee. There had meanwhile come to the well a great dark-skinned Bedouin, neither servile nor in rags, but a proud man, even richly clothed and cleanly, a hint of contempt in his glance at our array. I did not see his camel (he was gone before dawn), nor needed to be told that it was a *thelûl* of breeding. The man would ride no mean beast, to be shamed by it. I observed that he had mastered an overbearing but not truculent manner, and that he now displayed it, to save his pride before travellers who journeyed with so large a company. He had coffee of us, however, as all wayfarers whom we met, and was bidden to the entertainment of our fire, as all wanderers, whether in rags or silk; and choosing a station something apart from the muleteers and Mustafa's crew—suiting it, it seemed, to his own notion of his degree—he gravely squatted to listen to the impending stories.

"Whither?" I asked.

"By God's Gate," he answered, shortly.

I knew then that he was from the far wide desert to the east or south of Damascus, returning from some business in Egypt. In Damascus, being asked by the way, travellers to a secret destination reply that they go by God's Gate, and no more is said; it is an accepted form of evasion. The Bab Ullah of the city opens to the great desert.

XXIV

HALF-WIT OF THE LEBANON HILLS

HE reclined yet more comfortably on the rugs, in expectation of the first tale; and the dragoman—his being the turn—having renewed the coal on his *narghile*, told the following story of the fool of the Lebanon hills for the entertainment of the company. "There was once," Aboosh began, "a fool of the Lebanon hills who centred his folly in his little *tabl*, and would beat that little drum until the neighbors were tired of the music. Having bethought himself that travel was a salutary thing, he departed on a journey; and travelling far, he came one night to a desolate place in the mountains, where was no house to be seen, but only a mill, situate by a tumbling stream, for the grinding of corn. But he entered the mill, having no other shelter, and was presently aware that a great brown bear was another occupant of the place. The bear, as you may believe, came growling upon Half-wit, and Half-wit fled to the rafters, where in a frenzy, though clinging none too securely to his perch, he began to beat his little *tabl*, much to the terror of the bear, which scrambled to the door and there began to scratch for freedom.

"'Ah-ha!' thought Half-wit, 'if I cannot charm the beast, still can I frighten him,' and continued to beat on his little *tabl*.

"There chanced to pass that way a muleteer, whose beast was overloaded with water-bottles from the Damascus potteries: a fragile load, poised with difficulty on the back of any animal.

"'Ah-ha!' thought he; 'here am I, a forlorn muleteer, lost in the night and rain; but I hear the sound of a *tabl* and am heartened. Within is some festivity. I will open the door and join the merriment.'

"Whereupon he opened the door, and the brown bear, frantic now because of the drum-drum-drum of the little *tabl*, charged out, much to the amazement and terror of the muleteer and the mule. The mule, indeed, reared from the beast, slipped in the mud, and fell, shattering the burden of water-bottles beyond all hope of usage; then bolted like an evil spirit, and was seen no more that night, though diligent search was made.

"'Robber and thief!' cried the muleteer, seizing Half-wit by the nape, 'where are my water-bottles and where is my mule? You shall pay dearly for this. By the Prophet, I will take you to Damascus and there obtain judgment against you!'

"Nor would he wait one moment to depart, but made good his hold on the poor Half-wit, and set out for the city in the rain.

"'It is true,' sighed Half-wit, as they went, 'that the bear frightened your mule, and therefore all this

damage. I will go with you to Damascus to hear the judgment of the Cadi, for I am much interested in this intricate problem. Now,' said he, 'which is at fault, the mule or the muleteer, the bear or the poor Half-wit? We cannot punish the bear, which has escaped to the mountains, nor yet the mule, which was, of course, frightened by the bear; nor yet can we punish the muleteer, who opened the door in confidence. There is nothing for it, then, but that the Half-wit must suffer.'

"They came at last to Damascus, where for his iniquity Half-wit was thrown into a prison most vile; but while there he languished, awaiting the pleasure of the Cadi, there came to him a young lawyer of the town, to whose sharp ears the news of this unprecedented predicament had come. Into the care of this man Half-wit committed himself, and next morning went with him to the trial of the case, at which the lawyer began at once to accuse the muleteer in no unqualified way.

"'You rascal!' cried he, to the astonished muleteer, 'where is this man's trained bear? You unrighteous, thieving scoundrel! what have you done with this man's trained bear? Are you so heartless,' cried he, 'that you would separate these loving friends? Will you feed this man the bread you have filched from him? Will you give him the *metaliks* he was used to gathering, or will you cast him, forsaken and shred of his dear companion, upon the compassion of an unkind world?'

"By this declamation the wise Cadi of Damascus was so moved that he immediately gave judgment in favor of poor Half-wit.

"'You rascally muleteer!' said he, 'you will pay this poor fool one thousand piastres for the loss of his trained bear or lie with the robbers in the dungeons.'

"The muleteer paid the Half-wit the money, glad to be rid of the difficulty at any cost; and Half-wit, weary of travel in a covetous world, returned to his own town in the Lebanon hills.

"'I lived here without a *metalik*,' said he, 'and was called a fool; but now that I am returned with a fortune they will respect my wisdom.'

"And this," Aboosh concluded, whiffing a cloud of fragrant smoke at the moon, "was indeed the outcome of the matter."

Hamed, the muleteer's boy, cast a bush on the fire, which had burned low during the recital of this long tale, and a multitude of sparks went roaring toward the stars. "This same Half-wit, being then in Damascus," said he, "was one night besought by some roisterers to drink.

"'Come,' cried they, 'drink with us!'

"'I am but a poor fool,' said he.

"'Nevertheless, poor Half-wit,' they replied, 'come drink!'

"'You drink,' he answered, 'to make yourselves what I am already. Why, therefore, should I drink?'"

There was a burst of laughter from the company. The answer was pronounced a good answer. Indeed, the young muleteer's tale was so warmly commended that in the flush of triumph he would immediately have begun another, had not Yusef the cook anticipated him. "There is another excellent story concerning this Half-wit," he began; "but as we are a company of Moslems and Christians, I hesitate to tell it." He was immediately assured by both parties that we were neither Moslems nor Christians, but fellow-travellers, passing in friendship into Egypt. "We are a company," he insisted, "of Moslems and Christians, and I hesitate to tell this tale." Eventually persuaded, however, that we were, every one, proof against animosity, in so far as the mere telling of tales was concerned, the cook (himself a Christian) proceeded: "Falling in with a company of Moslems on a Christian fast-day, Half-wit was accosted with a difficult problem, for it was in the minds of these men to insult him.

"'Observe that low-lived, mangy dog, nosing the refuse for foul things to eat,' said they, 'and then answer us this: Is the dog a Christian or a Moslem?'

"Now, indeed, was Half-wit fallen into a trap of difficulty and peril, for if he said that the dog was a Christian he would insult his own religion, and if he said that it was a Moslem he would be beaten to death. So he cudgelled his wits, such as he had, and presently was ready with the answer.

"'I have no opinion in this matter,' said he.

'Whether the dog is a Christian or a Moslem, it is beyond me to tell, being only a fool, but I know a way of determining the truth. It is not a difficult method, and as I am much interested in the problem of this dog's religion, I should like to see it tried. Is not this a Friday? Very good; it is a Friday. The day is propitious for the trial. Throw the dog a piece of meat.'

"They demanded an explanation.

"'It is a fast-day of the Christians,' answered Half-wit. 'If the dog eats the meat, he is surely no Christian.'"

There was no rancor in the laughter which greeted the conclusion of the cook's excellent story.

XXV

A DESERT DETECTIVE

CAME talk of desert travel and camel-thieving: the latter an honorable occupation among the Bedouins—the enviable achievement, indeed, to which the youth of the tribes aspire and are taught and hardened. Ali, the black Soudanese corporal from El Arish, then entertained the company by relating a curious experience, concerned with the reading of footprints, wherein there appeared to much advantage a detective of those parts. "When the camel-droves were last passing over this route into Egypt for sale," said he, "four Bedouins of some beggarly tribe to the south thieved ten of a merchant's three hundred beasts, the thing being accomplished in the night, one day's journey from this well. From El Arish, in answer to the man's complaint, I was sent with a small company to recover the camels; and there went with us to follow the tracks a wise old man possessing the knowledge of *ilm el athr*, or the science of footprints, who is employed by the English for no other purpose.

"'Here,' said the merchant, when we came to his encampment, 'are the hoof-prints of one of my ten camels.'

"'I observe,' said the wise Bedouin, 'that you have come from El Hamad. The camel is a male, not yet two years old; he is afflicted in the breast, and will die, if hard driven, within three days. Show me the track of another; there is no profit in following this, for our search would end in the flight of vultures.'

"'How can you know this?' demanded the merchant.

"'There is no merit in the power to know,' answered the student of *ilm el athr*. 'The thing is plainly written in the sand.'

"We set out, then, on the track of a second beast; and having travelled two days, we came upon a young camel, rising two years, afflicted in the breast, abandoned, and dying. For four days more, the Bedouin being afoot, we followed the hoof-prints of the second camel; and though some wind blew (but no rain falling)—though the stolen camels had been driven deviously, and, sometimes, over travelled routes—we eventually encountered the very camel of which we were in search, feeding with the herd of this beggarly southern tribe.

"'This,' said the wise Bedouin, 'is one of your ten camels; now do you choose out the others for yourself.'

"But the merchant was doubtful.

"'It is true,' said he, 'that this is my camel, for I observe that he is marked with the *wasm* of the place whence I had him; but my ten camels are no more

than a thirtieth part of my three hundred, and how shall I know them if they are not marked?'

"'Then,' said the Bedouin, 'I must answer for your helplessness and find your camels.'

"They went together into the desert, where the herds of the tribes were pasturing; and there the Bedouin—looking for no *wasm*, but observing only hoof-prints—selected eight beasts, which proved, indeed, to be the stolen camels, each being marked with the *wasm* of the place whence the merchant had them. It is all a mystery," Ali concluded. "I do not know how he managed the thing. He told me it was by means of a science, which must be taught; but he would not teach me, though I asked him."

"The Bedouins have a proverb," Mustafa, the camel-driver, put in. "They say: A man's face is like his feet."

"I have known a sheik of the Soudan," Ali answered, smartly, "to tell the temper of a man from his footprints, but never to describe the length of his beard."

Mahmoud, the big muleteer, burst out laughing; then all the others, caught by Ali's tart wit.

"And I," Mustafa insisted, "have known a poor Bedouin of these parts to measure the stature and weight of a night robber by his track."

"That," said Ali, "is a reasonable thing—not magic."

They make a mystery of this obscure science of footprints. It is, at any rate, a marvellous thing, merely that, for example (and the thing is not only

well known, but a familiar accomplishment), a man should be able to tell whence a camel or a wanderer — whether from city or mountain, sandy desert or hard-bottomed waste—by the imprint of his feet; for the track, it must be borne in mind, is not sharply defined, not an accurate mould, but a thing blurred and often almost obliterated by falling sand and drift dust. The power, however, goes much further than this: even to determining the weight of a camel's load, his physical condition, whether pursued or merely in haste; and to discovering, from the foot-prints of a man, his tribe, and whether he has passed stealthfully or openly (whether friend or foe).

There was more talk of this, with these simple folk, now drawn nearer the fire, listening in awe, as to a ghost story. Then one of the camels—the seven were lying just beyond the circle of firelight—rose complaining. Mustafa's Ahmed slipped away upon his duty. Presently I heard his guttural cawing to get the camel again to rest; but the beast would not down, and must be beaten— the boy meanwhile mouthing great curses. I wondered that a being so small should without peril to himself strike a creature like this with his fist, continuing all the time within reach of teeth and hoofs.

"I will tell the *khawaja*," replied Mustafa, "a most curious and interesting thing about this."

Ahmed had mastered the camel, and now came to his place.

"The *khawaja* has observed," Mustafa continued, "that a child may beat and command a camel. It is not because the camel is stupid, nor yet because he is timid; it is because of a wise provision whereby God suited him to the weakness of men. The camel's eyes are like magnifying-glasses, and increase the stature of his master seven times: wherefore he is obedient to this gigantic-appearing creature."

In Damascus, too, I heard this superstition.

The grave Bedouin from beyond Damascus, who had listened with rising interest and geniality, now contributed something to the instruction of the company, as if wishing to bear himself like a man in the evening's entertainment. She-camels, he said, are foster-mothers to the mares of the desert where he dwelt. A mare, said he, is the chiefest possession of the sheik, and also his most troublesome burden; and a sheik with a wife in addition, as the proverb has it, lives to regret his riches, being much worried by the ills of both these delicate creatures. Lacking grass, the sheik's horse is not sustained by the desert herbs and bushes, upon which the camel thrives—not green and succulent fodder, but a growth dry and gray and often thorny. The horse must be fed with milk, which she drinks with impatient relish, so that to foster every desert mare is assigned a milch-camel. When the camels go to farther pasturage, the horse must accompany them; and upon long journeys camels must be taken, not only to provide milk, but to

bear water as well, a camel's-load of water sufficing the horse, it is said, for but two days. The sheik's satisfaction, however, is an adequate compensation. It resides not only in the pride of possession, but in a more practical and worthy thing—security and greater efficiency in warfare. The camel is a stupid, lumbering, slow-moving beast; the mare is both gallant and clever, quick to wheel, ready to charge, swift in retreat through short distances. A sheik goes to battle with a led mare, which he will not have burdened even with his armor; he mounts her only when the engagement is imminent—the enemy in view, steel harness put on in the ancient fashion, the ancient weapon, sword or long spear, ready to the hand.

XXVI

THE MAGICAL MATCH

THE informing recital of the grave Bedouin, to which the company had listened with deepest attention, was now suddenly interrupted by the jangling of a mule's bell and a great hullabaloo. Our circle broke and spread laughing from the fire; and into the light sprang a small figure, led by a halter in the hands of Rachid, and wearing a great *abba* of sheepskin overhead and a bell about the neck.

"What's this?" Aboosh demanded.

"It is the Half-wit of the Lebanon hills," cried Rachid, "come to entertain the *khawaja* with his trained bear!"

Proceeded then this hilarious entertainment, to the accompaniment of such a joyous noise of bell and shouting and laughter as had never before, I fancy, amazed the solemn desert of those parts. "La, la!" sang Rachid; and Ahmed, the camel-boy, reared and danced and tumbled until he was breathless, whereupon he stood on his head, his lean, ulcerated little legs sticking straight up in the firelight. He was presently standing before the *khawaja*, crying, "*Backsheesh! backsheesh!*" but, therewith provided,

still remained, craving (as he said) a boon. "Yesterday," he besought, "when the *khawaja*, riding his horse, passed the camels in the mid-day heat, and the camel-boys were worn, each boy clinging to the tail of his camel, the *khawaja* rode slowly to converse. The *khawaja* will remember because he laughed when the red rooster crowed in the crate on the back of my camel. 'Are you not tired?' said the *khawaja*. I answered, 'I am not tired.' 'You have walked far in the sand,' said he; 'are you not tired?' I answered again, 'I am not tired.' For the third time the *khawaja* put the question, and for the third time I answered, 'I am not tired.' 'For this cheerful behavior,' said the *khawaja*, 'I will once again work the magic of the match when the day's journey is over.' But the *khawaja* forgot; and now has come the second night, and he has still forgotten."

Fortunately, the unkind forgetfulness was not hard to remedy; the *khawaja* gathered them all near, and turned grave and distant, and smoothed the sand, all in preparation for the magical feat of The Match That Cannot Be Broken. The desert had by this time returned to its ancient solemnity—a silence so deep and wide and old that the small crackling of the fire was like an irreligious disturbance.

"A *mejidi*," promised the *khawaja*, "to the one who surprises the secret."

The attention was tragically earnest.

"Now," the *khawaja* began, Aboosh interpreting the patter as fast as it fell from the *khawaja's* lips,

"I have here a handkerchief. The eyes of the clever Ahmed will tell him that it is an empty handkerchief. Observe, Ahmed, that I shake it. I take it by the corners, Ahmed, and shake it. I show you this side —I show you the other. And now, having convinced you that the handkerchief is empty, I spread it on the sand, here in the very brightest of the firelight. Keep watch. A *mejidi* to the diligent observer! Mahmoud will give me a match. Ahmed will himself take the match in his very own hands and discover that it is a match like any other match. He will with this pencil mark the match with some *wasm* of his own invention. But the *khawaja* touches the match—keep watch!—and it is straightway become the magical match that cannot be broken. I drop the magical match upon the magical handkerchief. It is the self-same match. It is the self-same handkerchief. Observe my hands; they are empty. Keep watch—a *mejidi* to the diligent observer. I roll up my sleeves. There is still nothing in my hands. I fold this corner of the handkerchief over the match. I fold another—and the third, and the fourth. And now Ahmed will with his own hands find the match in the folds of the handkerchief and break it in halves. Listen! The magical match is broken. You have heard it crack between the fingers of Ahmed. But it is a magical match; and, behold! I unfold the handkerchief, and the magical match, marked with the *wasm* of Ahmed, done with his very own hands and of his very own

invention, is not broken: nor is there another match anywhere to be discovered! It is a mystery!"

"A devil-match!" ejaculated the grave Bedouin, starting back in religious horror.

"*Wellah!*" groaned Mahmoud, "I am bedevilled again!"

The others were amazed beyond utterance of any sort—save this little Ahmed, who emitted what may be likened to a gurgle of delicious fright. The second match, of course—the match which Ahmed had broken—was concealed in the hem of the handkerchief; but not one of them fathomed the simple mystery, which was always to them a bewildering delight. Nor in a coffee-house in Damascus, where the *khawaja* performed the wonder, late of a night before the pilgrimage, did these wiser folk have better success. "Why go to Mecca?" said a pious camel-driver of the pilgrims; "for have we not here a prophet?"

"A feat!" cried Mustafa. "I, too, will perform a feat!"

We made a ring in the moonlight—and fell silent and watchful while the old fellow gravely wound his skirt about his middle. An athletic performance—evidently some mighty acrobatic feat of the desert!

"Observe!" said Mustafa.

Our attention deepened; and Mustafa—having bowed with much politeness to the company—turned a somersault!

"Catch me!" shouted the younger *khawaja*. Here was a familiar game; the challenge, though spoken in English, needed no interpretation. They reached to seize him; but the younger *khawaja* leaped from the quick hands of the big muleteer, dodged the cat-spring of the Soudanese, buffeted Aboosh, overturned the Bedouin, and darted off into the moonlight with a whoop like a shriek of a disappearing locomotive. They were after him in a flash—a yelping, giggling, hallooing, guffawing pack, leaping over the moonlit sand like shadows with half-fledged wings. *Wellah!* but the loosed delight of that pursuit—the triumph of the capture! Then must the fleet Ali be caught, the black, lean-legged Soudanese, which was not hard to do at all, for at the barest touch he screamed and collapsed like a tickled girl. The younger *khawaja* must take Ahmed on his shoulders, and the small Abdullah be mounted on the gigantic Mahmoud; whereupon, a lively tilting, done without mercy—ending in the downfall of both. Ring-around-a-rosy—and the desert fairly groaned from the vigor of the squatting! Bull-in-the-ring—a mad success! Crack-the-whip—and the climax of earthly joy was achieved. We put the camel-boys on the end of the line; we sent them tumbling head over heels—rolling over the soft sand like rag balls—far into the farther moonlight. *Wellah!* but they would be cracked again. By the Prophet! the thing must be done. And we cracked them with such joyous fervor that we never expected to see them more.

THE GRAVE BEFORE DEPARTED

In the uproar of laughter I put my hand on the shoulder of Ahmed. "Are you happy?" I asked.

"By God!" he swore, his hands clinched with earnestness, "but I am happy!"

Mustafa clamored to be cracked—for the very joy said he, of this swift flight. We indulged Mustafa; we put Mustafa where he craved to be, and we gripped hands with a new and mightier grip, and we ran faster, and farther, and we turned more abruptly, and we cracked the old gentleman clean out of sight over the ridge of a sand-drift.

"By Mohammed!" he screamed, returning; "but there is a deep hole in the desert where I alighted!"

And with this the evening's entertainment came to an end.

It was time to turn in. The grave Bedouin had departed upon his journey, having given us farewell with many compliments. The camp had disposed itself to sleep. The fire was burned out. All the desert lay silent under the moon. There was no rustle of the palm leaves, no chirp or stirring anywhere; the whole world—to its uttermost reaches—was still. I walked with the younger *khawaja* to smoke to the camels—the last employment of our day. Presently he looked about upon the forms of our people and guest of the night.

"These fellows are happy," said he. "I think," he added, "that we have found a good way to travel."

I thought so too.

XXVII

A WOE-BEGONE POET

THERE came, once, a thick, hot dawn: no rosy color in the east—no cool tint or stirring of the air. Who had been used to the refreshment and cheerful expectation of the morning had now no spirit for the road. We labored into a salt-marsh, most foul and desolate, a dreary place, lying dead under a sullen sky: slimy pools, listless rushes, a crust of salty mud, through which our horses floundered, breaking now and again to their bellies. When we came again to the sand, a breeze was blowing from the east, but brought no relief, being hot and dry, as from an oven. It rose quickly to a gale of wind. The air was all at once dusty and unpalatable; the encompassing hills disappeared in a mist of driven sand—the road vanished beneath out feet.

Presently, the wind still rising, there was not a hoof-print to be descried; the desert was trackless: we were haplessly—even perilously—lost. The noise of the gale—a swish and shrieking, as at sea—was a confusing commotion, and the flying sand choked and stung and blinded us. There was nothing to be seen in the fog of dust but the nearer hills—smoking

like crested seas in a hurricane—which the wind was shaping anew. For hours we wandered westward, urging the nervous, complaining beasts in the direction of water, which we might not hope to find, since at best the well was no more than a speck in that wilderness.

In the late afternoon we staggered by chance into a deep gully, with the wind howling overhead; and in this sheltered spot Aboosh found the hoof-prints of the road—faintest depressions, almost obliterated by fine sand sifting from above. Here, too—and to our amazement—we encountered a Mecca pilgrim, on his haunches, his head wrapped in a mantle, waiting with religious patience for the storm to pass. The wind fell then, and the heavy sand-fog immediately settled; and following the pilgrim's directions (he had come from Kantara)—depending somewhat, too, upon the configuration of the desert for guidance—we came, by happy fortune, to the well of Googaa long after sunset.

I caught Rachid sitting worn and downcast at the edge of the palm grove, apart from the tents.

"Here," said I, "is a disconsolate adventurer!"

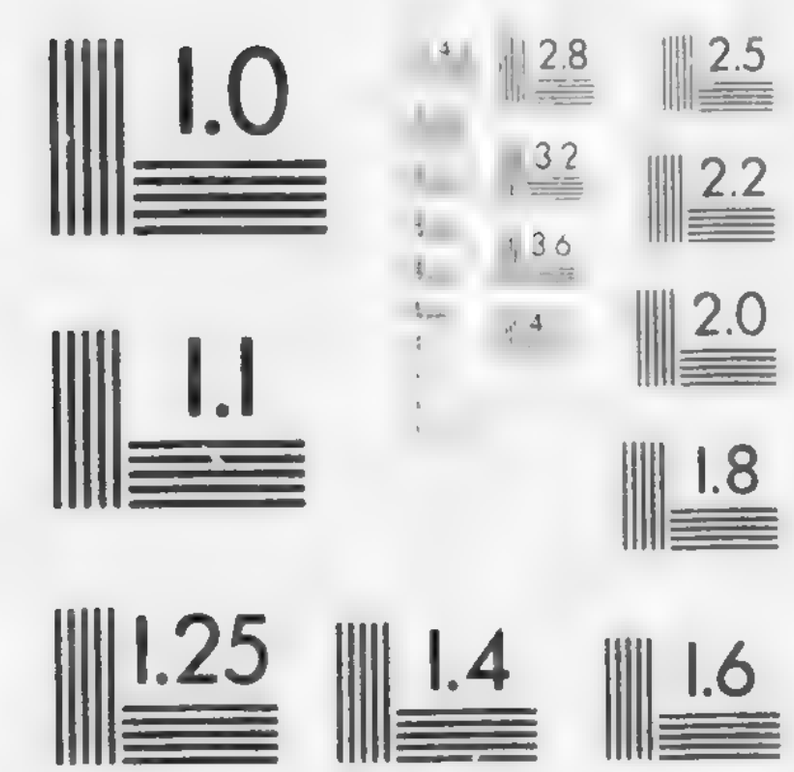
"We draw near the end of our journey," he replied, "and I think of a misfortune that has befallen me."

"Of what did you think when the sand was blowing and we were lost?"

"Of the goodness of Aboosh, the excellent *khawaja*, who gave me his horse to ride."

MICROCOPY RESOLUTION TEST CHART

ANSI and ISO TEST CHART No. 2



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"Of nothing else?"

"Still," he replied, "of my misfortune. I am like the pious Mohammedan who prayed for one hundred pieces of gold," he proceeded. "He conceived himself to be of that quality of holiness which opens the heart of God to every prayer.

"'I desire,' said he, 'one hundred pieces of gold; wherefore I will pray for it, and presently I shall receive the gift of every *piastre*.'

"Thereupon he prayed both night and day, beseeching with diligence, but received no gift of gold from Heaven.

"'I will not despair,' said he; 'still will I continue to pray, and eventually my piety shall be rewarded.'

"For a year, it is related, his prayer ascended continuously; and by this time, so constant had he been, the habit of praying for one hundred pieces of gold possessed him so that he prayed upon every occasion, 'O Lord, send me one hundred pieces of gold!' no matter where he might be. One day, sitting in the shade of a high wall, he besought the Lord, as was his custom, crying: 'O Lord, give me one hundred pieces of gold! O Lord, send me one hundred pieces of gold from Heaven!' Instead of one hundred pieces of gold falling from the heavens, the wall, in the shade of which he rested, tumbled down upon this pious Mohammedan: whereupon, as it is related, he got up from the dust, and, having lifted his hands to the sky, cried, in great indignation:

"'I prayed for one hundred pieces of gold, and

have been overcome by the descent of one hundred cruelly falling bricks from the wall that I trusted; therefore I will never pray again.'

"Does the *khawaja* recall the shore of the sea near El Arish," Rachid continued, "where the tents were pitched by the date-palms, and the *khawaja* drank tea by the very waves, where his poor servant had placed the little table? Ah, but I wished that we might travel the desert no longer, but forever stay near the sea; and I prayed most diligently for one thousand gold napoleons, so that I might forever maintain the *khawaja* and all his servants in that place. I am like the poor pious Mohammedan of the tale," he continued; "for, though I prayed lustily for the gold, when I went into the water to wash the shell of the tortoise which the younger *khawaja* had given to the cook to boil clean, not only did I find no purse of gold on the shore, but lost the three copper *beshliks* that I had, which slipped through a hole in my pocket."

"It is a grave misfortune," said I.

"Now," he added, looking up, a woe-begone poet, indeed, "I am come near a strange city, and have not a *metallik* to my name."

"Come!" said I; "have you not heard the story of The Diligent Young Darwish of Al Busra?"

Rachid looked up in cheerful expectation.

XXVIII

THE DILIGENT YOUNG DARWÎSH OF AL BUSRA

THIS story I had from Ahmed Ased-Ullah, of Damascus, the writer of scrolls. From his collection of masterpieces he had taken an example of the art of Al Emad al Hasanî Shiraz—a sentence done with a reed pen upon parchment. "As all words are equally important to the expression of the perfect poet," said he, "so here, too, by the art of the perfect writer, no word is exalted above another by improper display. Even so, there is no monotony—an engaging, restful variety, indeed, such as the printing-press cannot command. Employ this microscope: discover if you can a ragged edge to any letter—the broadest shading, the thinnest line. What a pen-maker the man was! With what incredible accuracy he shaped his reeds! Note the grace of curve, the certainty of line: there is no interruption, no failure of symmetry, no deviation, no sign of wavering. This letter, extremely removed from a similar character, but not differing a hair's-breadth! This broken oval—perfected by an imaginary line! This arc, a mere fragment of the whole, but yet suggesting the perfect circle! This accent, perfectly set within its

AHMED ABED ULLAH THE WRITER OF SCROLLS

allotted space—" And the old man rattled on until his breath failed.

I asked him whence he had the ancient scrap of writing.

"We have in Damascus a proverb," he answered: "He who seeks with diligence shall find. I will answer your question by telling a story. A young Darwîsh of Al Busra, having come to Damascus upon some pilgrimage, fell in love with the daughter of a rich sheik, whom he passed in the street. Overcome by passion, he followed the girl to her father's house, where, bold beyond belief, he knocked on the gate, and was presently admitted to the sheik's presence.

"'I have come,' said he, 'to ask the hand of your daughter.'

"The sheik laughed heartily.

"'He who would have the hand of my daughter,' he replied, 'must bring rich gifts to urge his suit.'

"By this scornful behavior the poor Darwîsh of Al Bursa was not discouraged, but with good heart asked the quality of the gift he must offer. To be rid of him the sheik set him an impossible task.

"'Fetch to me,' said he, 'the stone that is more precious than diamonds.'

"To this the Darwîsh agreed, and, having borrowed two buckets from the kitchen, set out upon his quest, followed by the laughter of the sheik and all his servants. When he had traversed the desert to

the south, he came at last to the Red Sea, where for two months he diligently employed his buckets, believing that a stone of rich price must be deeply hidden. Bail as he might, he made no impression upon the sea, but continued patiently to bail. When six months had passed he observed that the water was as high as ever. Not disheartened, however, he renewed his diligence, until, at the end of two years, one day when the tide was out he came upon a curious stone, which he believed must be the stone the rich sheik desired. So, travelling in high hope, he came again to Damascus, and was admitted to the sheik's presence, ragged as he was, and there related his adventures.

"'Now,' said he to the sheik, 'I have brought you the stone that is more precious than diamonds.'

"The sheik took the stone, and perceived that it was a common stone—a mere pebble.

"'In exchange,' continued the Darwîsh, hopefully, 'I shall have the jewel that is better than all.'

"'By Allah!' cried the sheik, 'such diligence should be rewarded!' and immediately gave the hand of his daughter to the diligent young Darwîsh of Al Busra. And so," concluded Ahmed Ased-Ullah, "having sought with diligence an example of the genius of Al Emad al Hasanî Shiraz, I am rewarded in its possession."

I pointed the moral anew. "He who seeks with diligence shall find," said I to Rachid; "though you

have not a *metallik* to your name, you may yet possess a fortune."

"Does the *khawaja* not know another story?" he asked.

I perceived that, like a child, he loved a tale, but regarded a moral with distaste; and to delight him I said that I would tell the stories of Ahmed el Nirizi and The Ugly Writer of Teheran, which also I had from Ased-Ullah, of Damascus, the writer.

XXIX

THE UGLY WRITER OF TEHERAN

"LONG ago," Ahmed Aśed-Ullah began, in Damascus, "there was a writer, Ahmed el Nirizi, who, having arrayed himself as became a man of his fame, set out upon a journey to the country of a powerful sheik of Nejd, but was unhappily set upon by Bedouin robbers in the mountains between. Stripped to his shirt, dispossessed of all that he had except his ink and his paper, which he had fortunately concealed, he still proceeded to the city of the sheik, hoping there to find favor sufficient for his re-establishment, but was denied at the door of the sheik's palace because of his scanty apparel and beggarly, woebegone air. Day after day, however, he renewed his request, insistently repeating, notwithstanding the scorn of the sheik's men, that he was Ahmed el Nirizi, the writer, until at last, in order that his importunity might be stopped, he was received by the sheik's eldest son, to whom he told the tale of his misfortunes.

"'What!' cried the sheik's son, in amazement. 'Here, surely, is an impudent impostor. This naked beggar cannot be Ahmed el Nirizi, the writer!'

SPECIMEN OF WRITING OF THE PERSIAN SCHOOL

"Ahmed el Nirizi stoutly maintained that the shirt which measured the Bedouins' compassion did indeed cover the body of none other than the famous Ahmed el Nirizi.

"'Though I have been robbed of my raiment,' said he, 'I have not been stripped of my skill.'

"Pleased with this alliteration, the prince commended him, but was still not convinced. So Ahmed el Nirizi took a reed from his silver horn, which was slung from his belt, shaped it with a knife, commanding such care as he could and wrote nine of the ninety-nine names of Allah, with a hand that wavered, to be sure, but still in a way to shame neither the grace and proportion which celebrated his manner nor the arrangement which still further distinguished him.

"'It is well done,' said the sheik's son. 'Observe, now,' said he, 'that though you shaped your pen with a knife, I shape mine with my finger nail.'

"Having then fashioned a rude instrument, he wrote, with some art, an order upon his father's treasurer for five hundred *tomauns*, to be paid to whomsoever should present it, and gave the example of his skill to Ahmed el Nirizi.

"'Which now,' said he, 'is the better writing, yours or mine?'

"Ahmed el Nirizi had not taught the sons of a Shah for nothing. He was ready for the puzzle.

"'By all means,' he answered, delighted with the task, 'yours is the better.'

"'Is it so?' cried the sheik's son, enraged by this flattery. 'Then,' said he, withdrawing the order from the hand of Ahmed el Nirizi and tearing it in a thousand pieces, 'you shall prove it, or, by the Prophet, it shall be the worse for you!'

"'As two are greater than one,' answered Ahmed el Nirizi, readily, 'so is your writing greater than mine.'

"The prince demanded an explanation.

"'My writing is beautiful, it is true,' said Ahmed el Nirizi; 'but yours,' he added, touching his heart and lips and brow, 'is both beautiful and beneficent.'

"The sheik's son was so delighted with the alliteration and with the answer," Ahmed Ased-Ullah concluded, "that he immediately drew an order for one thousand *tomauns* and presented it to Ahmed el Nirizi."

Rachid, much pleased with the tale, demanded the story of The Ugly Writer of Teheran, which forthwith I related: Aba al Kasem al Darwîsh, a Persian, who held his skill in higher regard than his life, and, indeed, had nothing else to esteem, because he had no personal attractions, sought a commission from Ali Shah, thinking to establish his fame as a court writer and in this way be remembered. "If I please the King," thought he, "then, indeed, shall I be famous." It was a bold thing to do, and Aba al Kasem was warned, but continued obdurate, determined at whatever cost to be remembered.

"What!" cried the Shah, when the petition was presented. "Shall I, who have to do with soldiers and scholars, speak with a mere penman? Dismiss the impertinent fellow! I will have nothing to do with a man of so mean an occupation."

But this unfortunate disposition toward the fine arts was presently overcome, and Aba al Kasem al Darwîsh was admitted to the presence. No sooner had the unhappy man entered than the Shah started back with an ejaculation of horror and disgust. The writer was indeed the ugliest of creatures. No grace of the graces of form and feature had been vouchsafed to him, nor, to mend his appearance, had he acquired the least accomplishment of manner; so that, indeed, he was more agreeable to the company of camel-drivers than the audience of kings. He was hunchbacked and hairy, cross-eyed, clubfooted, bandylegged, and his hair fell wild and matted over his shoulders, his beard far below his middle, his hands repulsively below his knees. He had nothing to recommend him to the favor of the world but the delicate skill with which he employed his reed pens: and concerning this he knew very well.

"This is not Aba al Kasem al Darwîsh!" cried the Shah. "Conduct him hence. I shall lose sleep on account of him."

The Shah was informed that this was Aba al Kasem and none other.

"What!" cried he, covering his eyes from the sight of the writer's ugliness. "It is impossible! *This*

cannot be Aba al Kasem al Darwîsh, whose art has delighted me! How can the *very perfection of beauty* proceed from a form so horrible?"

"It is I," Aba al Kasem insisted.

"Then," demanded the Shah, "in God's name, where were you when God distributed the various graces of person?"

"When God gathered the sons of men together to receive these pretty gifts," said Aba al Kasem, scornfully, "I was busily engaged."

"Got you no share?"

"I was absent," answered Aba al Kasem, "upon a quest."

"Unfortunate man!" cried the Shah; "what did you find to compare with that which you have lost?"

"That *very perfection of beauty*," answered Aba al Kasem, quickly, "of which your Majesty has made mention."

By this the Shah was so delighted that he commended Aba al Kasem's devotion, and commissioned him to inscribe a Koran with such illumination as had never been known before.

"I forget my sadness," said Rachid. "Does the *khawaja* not know one more story?"

"Time passes," I objected.

"But the *khawaja* is washed," he insisted, "and Elias has not yet called to supper."

I told the tale of The Shirt of the Only Contented Man.

XXX

THE SHIRT OF THE CONTENTED MAN

"THERE was once a Sultan," said I, "who fell ill, and was greatly distressed by his ailment, which sadly interfered with certain plans he had made for the conquest of his enemy.

"'A physician to cure me,' he cried, 'that I may proceed upon my business!'

The court physician, failing to cure him overnight, was decapitated the next morning.

"'Another!' cried the Sultan; 'and if he fails, as this one, he shall suffer the same fate.'

"The second physician, signally failing to ease the Sultan's pain before dawn, lost his head before noon. A third, with remarkable temerity, presented himself, and vanished from the sphere of his endeavor. And so it went on, day by day, until the kingdom was depleted of physicians, save only one, who was summoned to the Sultan's presence.

"'Your Majesty is in evil case,' said he. 'Within my experience I have met with but one other so grievously situated, and he was a donkey-driver. To be cured of your affliction,' the physician unhesitatingly prescribed, 'your Majesty must sleep in the shirt of a contented man.'

"Pleased with this curious advice, the like of which no other physician had offered, the Sultan commanded seven contented men to be fetched before him, thinking to choose a shirt to his liking. But look high and low, as his ministers did, no contented man was to be found in the kingdom; whereupon the impatient Sultan commanded the search to be carried yet more distantly, even to the desert and mountains beyond his domain. After three months, during which the Sultan suffered excruciating pain, a fortunate emissary chanced upon an object of the search, a contented man, who inhabited a wretched cave in the mountains, and was the most destitute of all the creatures of that neighborhood—a hermit, ill-nourished, ill-clad, and meanly housed.

"'It is true,' said the hermit. 'I am a contented man. I possess all that I want. I lack nothing of my need or desire.'

"Upon this admission they haled him into the presence of the Sultan.

"'Come,' cried the Sultan, weary of his pain, 'off with your shirt!'

"But it was unhappily true," I concluded, "that the contented man *had* no shirt!"

Rachid laughed.

Here at the Well of Googaa was our last camp made in the desert; we should next pitch tents, the day favoring our journey, on the bank of the Suez Canal, at Kantara, whence our followers would re-

WE MADE OUR CAMP BY THE WELL

turn to Jerusalem with the caravan by the way we had come, leaving us to take train to Cairo. We had no camp-fire; the camel-boys and Hamed had searched the nearer sand for something to burn, but had returned empty-handed, the neighborhood having long ago been swept by passing travellers. The wind had gone down, however, and presently the moon was up; and the younger *khawaja* and I sat with Aboosh by the door of the tent—and the muleteers and camel-drivers squatted on the sand—and we had travelled far and companionably together—and we were comfortable enough (if somewhat melancholy) on this last night alone. Ali Mahmoud, the big muleteer, and Mustafa, the camel-driver, demanded to know more of that Abdullah from Ain el Kaum, the rascally camel-trader with whom the *khawaja* had fallen in at the *khan* of the camel-drivers in Damascus on the night before the pilgrimage.

It seemed that the man's rascality was appealing to them all, and I indulged them with Abdullah's tale of The Camel with the Glass Eyes.

XXXI

THE CAMEL WITH THE GLASS EYES

YOU will recall that the camel-trading Abdullah from Ain el Kaum, sitting in the balcony above the stable-yard of the *khan* in Damascus, told the tale of The Dog Which Bit the Stranger and that engaging story of The Needle and Thread. Having recited the latter, he was silent for a moment; and then, all at once, he leaned forward, with a vain little grin. "A rich American lady," said he, confidingly, "once fell in love with me. It was my beauty. She was overcome by it." Here was a foolish vanity—betrayed to the uttermost in a silly little laugh. "She loved me very much," Abdullah continued, "and would have me to America with her; and when I denied her, she had a mark tattooed upon my arm. 'By this mark,' said she, 'you will know that my love is everlasting. When you come to me, my life will be resumed; but if you linger, I perish.' No doubt," Abdullah concluded, with pride, "she has now perished of her love."

It is a familiar thing (I recall)—the incident of the lady tourist and the flirtatious Arab—but God knows why! I had heard tales of the disagreeable

mystery—of the ruin wrought by it; and I now assumed that some other woman had indeed pitiably forgotten her race for the moment, but was now recovered, not perished of her love, as Abdullah would have it. The thing was not interesting—but most melancholy—until Abdullah lifted the sleeve of his *abba* to exhibit the mark of the lady's poor infatuation; and then I laughed, and was downcast no more, for the mark was as old as Abdullah's infancy, having grown with his growth, being now blurred, not clear-cut of outline, as tattoo marks must be if made upon the full-grown person.

"Tell Abdullah, in the most elegant Arabic at your command," I said to the Interpreter, "that he is a hearty liar—and a most engaging one."

"If my service is occasionally inadequate," the Interpreter answered, bowing, "it shall now at least be abundantly sufficient."

"Fire away!" said I.

The Interpreter was occupied for some time; and at the end of it Abdullah was somewhat offended, but was presently mollified, so that he proceeded to relate the tale of the camel with the glass eyes, at which he had previously hinted.

"In a small village on the Beirut road," said he, "lives my relative; and sojourning once with him, on my way to Damascus, with Hassan, my son, I encountered a camel—and loved it. My admiration, *khawaja*, was like a fever consuming me; and I

must have that camel, I knew, or perish. But the camel was unworthy, after all—a beast fair to the eye but afflicted with madness, so that no man was safe as his master. Had I not been a camel-doctor, with knowledge of the split tail and compound of seven medicines, I should have hesitated to seek further acquaintance in the direction of my desire; but camel-doctor that I was—and am now so serving the pilgrims—I possessed the secret of this cure, and must have that beast. It is a simple thing: split the tail of the mad camel, so that the blood flow to the measure of a pint; pucker the skin of the brow in three folds, which must be fixed to remain with seven stitches, done with a clean needle; administer, then, the compound of seven medicines, and the affliction passes forever.

"'Come!' said I to this man, 'I am not afraid of your camel; let us trade.'

"He was overwilling to bargain, *khawaja*, else I should never have managed to outwit him in the manner you shall presently hear; but he laughed most heartlessly at my camel when I led him forth to trade. And, indeed, I was in hard case; for my camel was blind—so blind, *khawaja*, that his eyes were white with the cataract, and no man with eyes of his own could fail to observe the affliction.

"'My camel, as I must tell you, being a truthful man,' said I, 'is blind.'

"'I had rather,' he answered, 'have a mad camel than a blind one. There is no profit in talking

farther of this matter, for, by the Prophet! your camel would never win my affection.'

"'Your wisdom,' I answered, 'wins my respect. A blind camel, which should bear burdens, is himself a burden. Observe my camel,' said I, 'how very blind he is. Observe him carefully. Was there ever so blind a camel before I would know that camel,' said I, 'in a herd of a thousand.'

"'And I, by Allah!' said he, with much laughter, 'in a company of ten thousand.'

"'I will lead my camel away,' said I, 'lest his affliction offend you, and to-morrow I will depart for Damascus; but in six days I will return, bringing another camel, which I will exchange for this mad beast, for I love it.'

"Thus it fell out. In the morning I departed; and having come to Damascus, I removed the eyes from my blind camel, and inserted glass eyes in their stead; and I shaved him with much care, and saddled him with new cloth. Then I set out for the small village where dwelt my relative, to which, as I had planned, I came at dusk, God befriending me in this undertaking.

"'I am in much haste,' I said to the owner of the camel that I loved, 'else I would not trouble you with bargaining to-night; but if you would be rid of your mad camel, the thing must be accomplished at once.'

"He examined my camel, *khawaja*, in the dusk, as I had intended, and he fell in love with the beast, as I had foreseen.

"'Here is no blind camel,' said he, overwilling to be rid of his mad one, 'and I will trade.'

"Thus we traded, the thing being done in the presence of witnesses, according to the man's request; and I went to my relative's house three hundred piastres the richer; but the owner of the camel with the glass eyes set out on the back of his beast to try it, light remaining for this, and I saw him no more until morning, when he came to me in a great depression of spirits.

"'A strange thing has happened', said he. 'My camel has lost both eyes. They have dropped out, and I cannot find them, search as I may.'

"'The will of God,' I answered, 'is mysterious.'

"'I have come,' said he, 'to undo the trade.'

"'I am not averse,' I answered. 'Restore the eyes to my camel, and I will gladly give you back your own.'

"But this," Abdullah concluded, with a chuckle, 'the unfortunate man could not do."

"Here," said I, "is a tale of your invention."

"By God!" he answered, "the story is true."

"It is a tale," I insisted, "of your own invention."

"By God and Mohammed!" he swore, "the story is true."

I taunted him again.

"By God and Mohammed the Messenger of God!" he protested, "the story is true as I have told it."

All these Bedouins are great oath-dodgers—artful at swearing, with reservations. It is an excellent

thing; so many oaths they take that some way of escape from an ever-flowing perjury is demanded. I fancied now—sacred as the last oath had been—that Abdullah was tricking me; he must surely have his fingers crossed in the big sleeves. I required him to swear by his head and his religion, vowing to put away his wife if he failed in any particular of the truth: which is an oath (they say) that no Bedouin will violate.

"The *khawaja* knows," Abdullah answered, with a gentle smile, "that the oath is impossible!"

So I do not believe the tale of The Camel with the Glass Eyes; but it is a pleasantly fantastic invention, and I wish that I might. To the reality of the tales of The Needle and Thread and The Dog Which Bit the Stranger, Abdullah gravely swore, taking the threefold oath. They are true, it seems; but what matter? since, at any rate, they reflect the manner of his life, and present in an agreeably entertaining fashion the ethics of his business. Here was this Abdullah, no adherent of his tribe, which, to become a wandering camel-trader, he had deserted, much to the shame of him in the sight of all good Bedouins, who despise the man that yields his tribal identity to become a wandering individual. The ease and security of the towns had overcome him; he had now no stomach for the desert. "It is a life," said he, "of starvation and blood-letting, a life of the beasts, and I have found a better." This better had at

present to do with the pilgrimage; but was no hearty occupation, like that of the camel-masters, who in these days of preparation come in from the wilderness and truculently strut the bazars. As I subsequently learned, Abdullah was a leech upon the pilgrimage—at one with the thieves and cut-throats and all manner of evil men who follow, but was of a more subtle and respectable class.

It seemed, however (I recall), that he loved his young son overmuch, as do all Bedouin fathers, and would have him lead no life of the desert, but attend the Moslem schools of Damascus, that he might be an itinerant teacher of the Koran in the desert towns.

"But Hassan, my son," he sighed, "is of the lion-heart; he is impatient for the sword and the night expeditions of our tribe. Before long he will be away to the desert."

"What, now," I inquired, idly, "will his mother think of that?"

"What matter?" Abdullah answered, much bored.

I ventured a curious suggestion. "Suppose," I said, "that this Hassan learned the arts of war in England?"

"And returned?" Abdullah demanded, quickly.

"Even so."

Abdullah laughed a little. "Whe-e-e-e-w!" he whistled. "He would to his tribe add a hundred tribes," he declared, with eyes aflash. "There would in twenty years be a new prince in the desert —a prince like Ibn Rachid!"

We did not pursue this; and presently Abdullah, having rolled another cigarette, told, with a quick change of manner, the story of the merchant of Damascus and his venture into Nejd, as if he had but now recollected it.

XXXII

THE HONEST TRADER OF NEJD

"IN my life," said he, "I have roved much—from the Lebanon hills, through the country of the Druses, and to the southward a journey of ninety days into the Great Desert, where no Christian may go. To Nejd went I in my youth, with my uncle, a rich man, who dwelt there, dealing in camels; and to him came a merchant of Damascus, with three hundred camels for sale, the which he had driven for thirty days over the perilous desert, having heard that sickness had created a need of beasts in Nejd.

"'I am come with these three hundred camels,' said he to my uncle, 'and now I must sell them at a price or lose the fortune I have invested in the enterprise. God forgive me this undertaking, which has been too great for my strength! I am worn out with travelling, and in haste to return. In Damascus,' said he, 'they ask twelve napoleons for a camel; but I am so weary of this business that I demand no more than ten napoleons for each of my herd.'

"'It is a reasonable thing,' my uncle answered, 'but I must first consider the matter. Do you meet me at this place to-morrow morning, and we will talk

further of the business. Your camels are excellent beasts, and I would possess them.'

"Thereupon the merchant departed; and presently my uncle called me from the house.

"'Abdullah,' said he, 'you have heard this man, but he has not observed you. He is a simple man, now in hard case indeed, being able to drive his starved beasts no farther, and God has enlightened me with a plan to outwit him. Do you ride into the desert, where he may not encounter you before the time; and at this hour to-morrow do you return and present me with this writing, riding in haste and as one come from a great distance. If all goes well, we shall presently have much to thank God for.'

"All this I did—and, indeed, with much art. I came hot and dusty, with the mare in a lather, galloping as with a message of warning against sudden attack; and I fell from the back of my horse at the very feet of my uncle and the merchant from Damascus, crying:

"'God be thanked that I have arrived! I have sped far and most cruelly with this letter, being commanded to deliver it in haste by your agent in Damascus.'

"'I am busy with this good merchant,' answered my uncle, 'and will read the letter anon.'

"But I besought him by the Prophet to open the message, lest some misfortune befall him; and having indulged me, he gave great thanks to God for His compassion, and spread the news which the letter

contained, whereafter he came again to the anxious merchant, but now with a woful countenance.

"'God have mercy on you!' said he. 'I have no need of your camels.'

"The merchant demanded an explanation.

"'The price of camels,' answered my uncle, 'has fallen to five napoleons in the camel-market of Damascus. Here!' said he, 'read the letter for yourself. I grieve for you, friend, for it seems indeed that God would castigate you for some sin. Come!' said he, 'I am an honest man, with a heart of compassion for the unfortunate, and though I hesitate to interfere with the obvious purposes of God, I will take pity, and risk my soul's health by giving you four napoleons a head for your camels.'

"The end of it was," Abdullah concluded, "that when they had bargained for seven days, the merchant being hard to reduce, my uncle gave six napoleons for each of the three hundred camels, and profited much thereby; for there was a great need of beasts in Nejd at that time. I learned much," he added, "from that cunning man."

We left Abdullah then, for it was grown very late; but something I saw of him afterward, before the pilgrims set out for Mecca by God's Gate, and though I could conceive no friendly feeling for him, because of his villany, I still must entertain myself with the display. Upon the occasion of departure I chanced to bid him God-speed. The day was fair and warm,

THE SHIP OF A TRADER

the streets thronged, the town in a commotion of joyous excitement. There was no solemnity, except that settled upon the faces of the day-long streaming procession; there was no shower of blessings from the roofs of the houses, nor bombardment of holy injunctions from the bazars of the Medan, as men and beasts went by, but a lively bantering and tart criticism, as greets a parade in our own land. Beyond the city we stood to watch the passing of these poor folk.

I observed presently a long string of camels bearing no burdens.

"What camels are these," I asked, "and why are they thus favored?"

"These camels," they answered, "will take up the burdens of the beasts which perish in the desert."

I wondered that in the organization of the pilgrimage an official consideration of this magnitude had been shown. But I was presently enlightened; here was nothing official at all, but a private enterprise. Strutting behind his string of beasts, having not yet taken to the saddle, came Abdullah from Ain el Kaum; and when I clapped eyes on him I understood. Here were camels for sale to the unfortunate, who would pay through the nose for their misfortunes. The trader ran from the road to kiss our hands; and we gave him God-speed, according to the form. He waved his hand again, shouted, "For God and Mohammed!" and disappeared in the confusion. That was the last we saw of him. In

Cairo, six weeks afterward, when he should be arriving at his journey's end, I learned that the pilgrims were dying of the plague in Mecca at the appalling rate of nearly five hundred a day.

XXXIII

ON THE ROAD TO KANTARA

WE were now come to the last day's riding toward Cairo—Googaa westward to the Suez Canal at Kantara. It was melancholy enough, indeed—the nearing end of these weeks' placid desert travelling from Jerusalem; but yet remained one day of sandy open and the last encampment of our journey. When we emerged from the tent in response to the urging dragoman, it was to the wet shadows of dawn and the sullen haste of breaking camp—to the promise of hot weather, too, I observed: no cool glow of morning, rosily expanding, but a long wound of crimson light in the eastern sky, appearing feverish. The world beyond, thought I, was already a blistering place, its ways listlessly followed in the beating yellow light; and beyond—infinitely far beyond the horizon of this vacant desert—the sun had now gone down upon the snow of our own land, and the night air was there left still and frosty and blue.

Mustafa, the entertaining camel-driver, who of our caravan was first to be under way with his slow beasts, was waiting to give the *khawaja* the salutations; and having politely performed this ceremony

with his teeth chattering—the wind blew bitterly chill from the north while the earth waited for the sun—he went his noiseless way into the shadowy west, trailing after his string of camels, the camel-boys and swaying beasts grown gigantic in the slow dawn. It was broad day, cheerful weather and a fresh wind, when we mounted to follow; and those of us who were accustomed to ride together moved off at a footpace into the sand, heartily breakfasted and eager for the road, leaving Ali Mahmoud and his muleteers to load the unwilling beasts.

We had not gone far, however, before we were interrupted by a cry from the camp; and upon this we turned sharply, to discover a Bedouin in flying pursuit, his young son following—a man of impoverished estate, it seemed from his patches and tatters, when he had overtaken us.

"This poor man," said Aboosh, presently, "would offer a petition."

"Of what nature?" I asked.

"He has been wronged by his enemy," the dragoman answered, "and seeks redress."

"What redress have I to give?"

"The man is encouraged by the gossip of the cook's tent; it has come to his ears that six days past you dined with the English officers at El Arish, and he has grown hopeful."

The wretched Bedouin, somewhat bewildered by this foreign gabble, still regarded me in sanguine expectation. I observed that his lip hung loosely,

that his diseased eyes wavered; and I conceived that beneath the brown rags of his *abba* his heart beat with accustomed timidity.

"Tell him," said I, "that I have no power."

"It is useless," Aboosh answered; "having observed the English flag flying over your tent, the man will not believe it."

"Tell him, nevertheless, that I have no power," I repeated, "but that I will listen to his story for the entertainment it may provide."

Aboosh complied with bad grace.

"I am a tribesman of those hills which the *khawaja* may descry in the south," the Bedouin related, "and I have travelled these many days hitherward afoot, my young son accompanying to ease the pangs of loneliness. I am in lamentable case, truly, being a friendless man, bound now to El Arish to obtain justice of the English, an enemy having sorely wronged me. We are two tribes of pastoral Arabs," he continued, "dwelling side by side, pasturing our flocks and tilling the soil, and have continued in this proximity in peace through many generations. My little field lies between the cultivated ground of my people and the land of the neighboring tribe. That great fertile field which adjoins is possessed by a covetous man, with whom I might deal sufficiently, supported by my sheik, were he not the nephew of the sheik of his people. Year by year this man has encroached upon my land, now tilling a foot, now claiming to have sown where I cast my

seed, until there is nothing left to me but an unyielding strip of stony ground, and I am likely to starve with my son. The sheik of my enemy will not redress me lest he offend the man, who is a celebrated warrior in our parts and has a great following of disaffected persons among his tribesmen; and my sheik will give me no succor lest he involve our tribes in war, which have not warred for these generations. Nevertheless, the land is mine, and my son's after me, descended to me through the line of my forefathers, and I have not withdrawn the boundaries from the original marks, but have in every way complied with the land laws of my people. I am thus an unfortunate man, truly, abandoned by my people as a sacrifice to the ancient peace of our tribes; and it seems that my son will have no inheritance after me."

"It is an unhappy predicament, truly," I observed; "and I am amazed that you have not resorted to a private settlement of this affair."

"To what end?" he asked, with a shrug.

"To the end," I answered, "of preserving this inheritance to your son."

"I might accomplish the death of my enemy from ambush, truly," he replied; "but to what advantage this blood-feud? for the man is a man of great family, and my son would presently follow me to the grave. It is better that I should ask the English at El Arish to deal justly between us; and to this end," he added, with an upward glance of entreaty, "I

crave the boon of the *khawaja's* distinguished friendship."

"I grieve," said I, sadly, "that I cannot help you."

"Will the *khawaja* not obtain that justice for me?" the Bedouin begged.

Aboosh sighed. I fancied that the simple dragoman would have me intrude.

"Give this poor man *backsheesh* in reward for his story," said I, "and tell him that the English will deal justly."

"He will not believe," Aboosh replied, "that justice is to be had without influence."

"The lesson, then," said I, riding off, "will be to his advantage."

"Will the *khawaja* write no single word?" the Bedouin called, in entreaty.

We rode in a direction from El Arish, to which city the Bedouin was bound. I wondered that he followed us.

XXXIV

THE FIVE TROUBLES

FROM El Arish we had for five days ridden through a sandy desert, sparsely bushed with a mean gray growth; but here, nearing the canal, was no vegetation at all—an untouched waste of yellow sand, drifted in great hills, the edged ridges now smoking in a smart breeze, valleys and brief plains set in unchanging ripples. At noon it was cruelly hot riding: the breeze had fallen away, the desert air palpitated under the sun, the yellow world merged its outlines and was become a glare of hot reflection, featureless to our protesting eyes.

We had by this time overtaken Mustafa's camels, which we passed, and were closely trailed by Ali Mahmoud and his mules, with which the big master of the muleteers had followed speedily, according to the instruction of Aboosh. The cautious dragoman had said that though in the wide desert men and mules might with inviolable safety stray at will, the approach to town must be accomplished in company, lest some loss or worse catastrophe befall at the hands of practised robbers who might immediately escape to the confusion of a city.

The younger *khawaja*, however, who had jogged these days on the back of an army camel, a *thelûl* of beauty, was not riding in our company; with Taufik, the dragoman's peppery brother, and Corporal Ali, a business-like Soudanese of the garrison at El Arish, he was far in the rear, lost to view behind the sand-hills loftily intervening. From time to time Aboosh turned in his stirrups to peer into the glare behind; and so persistent was the offence against the quietude of our progress that I questioned his anxiety with much rudeness: upon which he answered mildly that if Taufik were to be accounted a reckless youth, Corporal Ali was a fool to indulge the younger *khawaja's* whim to linger on the road.

"It is true," I taunted, "of what you accuse yourself: you are not of the lion-heart."

He laughed. "You are a rascal, and would tease me!"

"I would not discover you," I answered, "in this foolish solicitude."

"It is my way thus to be anxious," said he, turning to look again.

For a time we rode without speaking—the young dragoman wretchedly downcast, it seemed: not interested, now, to keep his spare figure in the saddle with that exquisite grace to which he aspired, nor to poise his head in the proud fashion he cultivated, nor to glance boldly roundabout upon the world, nor to preserve the saucy angle of his mustache, nor in

any other way to display those vanities in which he was frank to find delight.

"Here is a poor dragoman," I presently complained, "thus to be full of sighs upon a journey!"

"I think of my five troubles," he replied.

"It would be interesting," I observed, "to hear them recounted."

He spurred his horse near with a gentle little laugh. "First," said he, the smile yielding place to an expression of genuine and reverent concern, "is my religion: I am no Mohammedan, to be content with the forms, but a Christian, who must live by the spirit; and I must constantly trouble myself with the question, 'Do I truly live in the fear of God?' Second," he continued, "is my flesh and blood: that mother, now grown old in Jerusalem, who fled with me over the desert from Mesopotamia, where my father was murdered; those sisters and their five children who are now dependent upon me; that Taufik, my brother, going to America—of all these I must ask myself, 'Do I serve them as my father would?' Third," he proceeded, "is my present duty: am I faithfully serving those who employ me? do they travel in the comfort and safety which I promised them according to my contract? And I am now troubled," he added, looking behind, "because the younger *khawaja* is not in sight. Fourth," he resumed, after a moment, "is my conduct: I must not fail to trouble myself with the question, 'Am I kind to the unfortunate?' for when I was a boy, travelling

the roads about Jerusalem to earn bread for my family, I did not receive kindness, and I remember the feeling. Fifth," he concluded, looking up from the hot road with a smile, "is my future. I am a young man, but one with many obligations, and I cannot help troubling myself with the question, 'What is to become of me?' A young man with obligations cannot honestly take new responsibilities; and, though I have no one in view at present, I cannot help wondering—"

And the excellent young fellow's recital ended in a burst of bashful laughter.

XXXV

A PRINCE IN MESOPOTAMIA

WE were interrupted, now, by the appearance of a band of Bedouin travellers, streaming unexpectedly over a near-by rise. They came swinging down the faintly hoof-marked track toward the valley wherein we labored deep in the sand-drift; and I observed that those mounted among them rode their camels without weariness, and that those afoot trod jauntily, all of them advancing with much hilarity, of calling to one another and of a chant-like singing. They would hearten themselves for the road by chanting war-songs (said Aboosh); and I recall that the approach in this manner—the long stride, the vigorous carriage, accompanied by the rhythmical sound of voices—was an enlivening spectacle.

There was none poor among them, it seemed; they were clad in fabrics of price, worn with an air in keeping with proud countenances, and the trappings of the beasts were new and abundant: here, indeed, was neither rag of poverty, the unkempt appearance of poor men, nor the lowered eyes of the meek. They came compactly upon us, with a great flashing

of eyes and grinning, throwing loud words in advance: two old men, I recall, appearing in authority, with a dozen stiff-necked fellows in a bearded prime, and some mischievous-mouthed boys.

It was a noisy passing; but Aboosh gave them no salutation in return, nor courteously yielded somewhat of the road, nor acknowledged them at all, but straightened in his saddle, riding now at the head of our caravan with that large assumption of dignity he could command, until they were well past and the answering badinage of our muleteers had ceased, whereupon he relaxed into listlessness, and the amusement was over.

"A saucy crew!" said I.

"Truly," he answered; "yet it is wise to go peaceably in a strange country."

Wearing the gray hairs of cautious age, I did agree; and I turned then to look back, but could catch no sign of the younger *khawaja* on the road.

It was ever hotter riding; we went between two flaming round wastes—sun overhead and sand underfoot: the desert had absorbed what heat it could contain, and now reflected the white rays with hardly diminished severity. There was no heart in our company for the accustomed diversions of the road: Mustafa had no tale to recite, Rachid no love-song of his composition with which to distract us from the weariness of this riding. I observed that Whishie, a masterless dog which had followed our

camp from Jerusalem, practised a cunning expedient, which, being a beast of "the wall," she had now first discovered. She would hasten in advance, paw a hole in a sandy slope, and snuggle in this small shade of her creation until we were well beyond, whereupon she would come running after us, either to repeat the performance or trot, tongue hanging, in the shadow of my horse, which was directly under his belly. There was no other incident to enliven the way; we were indeed most unhappily hot and restless and bored—save the camels of Mustafa, which continued the slow, invariable pace, indifferent.

In this emergency of tedium I demanded of Aboosh the story of the murder of his father in Mesopotamia.

"It is a wild tale," he replied.

"So much the better," said I. "The Bedouins have a proverb: A good story is the half of a day's journey."

"I am the second son," he related, as I may paraphrase the tale, "of the Man With the Cat. My father was the sheik of thirteen villages in Mesopotamia, with power to levy taxes and to gather them by force, and was in consequence a rich and powerful man, hated by his enemies and well served by those self-interested friends who thrived upon his bounty. I was a child when my mother fled with me into Palestine, and of the land remember only a swiftly flowing river, and of our state recall little more than a gray body-servant and a white horse; but my mother has told me many stories of our wealth—of flocks and

horses, of stores of corn, of the armed servants with whom my father rode, of jewels and carpets in a great house, of coffers in the cellar, from which gold and silver were not counted, but weighed. My father was a savage man, able to defend his life against attack in force, which, indeed, he must often do, but lived in dread of poisoning. For this reason he would never venture abroad without a cat: and into strange houses, where he must eat, he would carry her to taste the food, as an extraordinary precaution: so that to many people in Mesopotamia he was known (and is to this day remembered) as the Man With the Cat. In this way he balked his enemies, until a cunning plan was devised to outwit him. Invited to feast at the house of a friend, he laid off his shoes at the door, as the custom is, and while the entertainment was in progress some enemy poisoned his shoes in a curious manner: this being with fine fragments of glass upon which some deadly fluid had been allowed to dry. When my father returned from the feast, his feet were scratched and swollen: and he was presently dead of the lockjaw, leaving my elder brother, the father of this Taufik, to assume his station and the wealth of his office."

"The father of this Taufik who rides behind with the younger *khawaja* and Corporal Ali?" I echoed.

"Yes," Aboosh answered; "it is true that Taufik passes as my brother, and was nursed at my mother's breast, his mother having died; but he is in reality

my nephew, the son of my elder brother, who was slain by my father's enemies before the young man's birth."

"This Taufik," I asked "is then by right the sheik of thirteen villages in Mesopotamia?"

"It is true," Aboosh answered: "but what matter? for Jerusalem, to which my mother fled with us after the death of my father and brother, is a long way from Mesopotamia."

"I have a vision of adventure for the young man," said I.

Aboosh was puzzled.

"From America to return to Mesopotamia," I cried, enthusiastically, "and possess himself of that which was taken from his father."

"Why should he do this thing?"

"To be the sheik of thirteen villages."

Aboosh laughed heartily. "It is not worth while," said he, "to be the sheik of thirteen villages in Mesopotamia."

"Not worth while to live thus in princely state!" I exclaimed, aghast.

"It is in Mesopotamia," he retorted.

Nevertheless, the adventure upon which this young and stout-hearted Taufik might honorably embark seems to be an undertaking of proportions and rare flavor. The distance of the scene, the isolation of the struggle, the spears and flint-locks, are appealing aspects. My view, however, may be an error of the romantic imagination; perhaps, after all, it is

not an interesting thing to shed blood and dwell in jeopardy.

We rounded a great sand-hill, peaked and cliffed like a veritable mountain, and rode out upon a plain, gratefully hard underfoot. The horizon was a line of palm-trees, the continuity of green broken at intervals; there was no glimpse of water—no indication of change in the desert we travelled. Presently, however, against the background of sky and farther sand, the smoke-stacks of a steamship appeared, traversing the barren in a way to amaze the traveller from those remote places whence were we. Here, then, was the canal, it seemed; the paces of our untroubled journey were numbered. There was instantly the ending, indeed; a glimpse of smoke-stacks, and we were no longer nearing the familiar perturbations, but had returned to them. I wondered what time the train left Kantara for Cairo; and was there a time-table? and would there be a dining-car? or must the cook put up a bite to eat?

We mended the pace; the camels were urged to a lumbering trot, the mules hastened under the lusty calling of Ali Mahmoud, the dog ran barking in advance, the worn Rachid broke into the last dog-trot of his long travelling. A rusty tin can, obtruding from a little drift of sand, conveyed its suggestion; there was then the rag of a newspaper—presently the scattered refuse of a town, blown far out by the winds. Low houses emerged in shiftless detail from

the bank of palms, separating from these a half-hooded structure took form, and I distinguished the sound of a hammer. Other sunken stocks appeared; there was the fussy putting of a tug-boat, the blast of a steam whistle. The sand was unclean, the air polluted, here were all the aggravations come again.

We skirted the out-buildings of a wretched village, an outcast elbows settlement, weak in the knees, indolent, sore-eyed, and unwashed, and threaded a way among the hills of accumulated dredgings from the canal. At last, disheartened, we came to the bank, a green, swift-flowing stream (the tide then changing), bristling with the traffic of the world. Near by was this little town; between was a hand-propelled ferry, conveying camels toward Cairo; across was a trim railroad station, a grass-plot, a garden, and a switch-engine. The passengers of a slow-passing P. and O. liner came to the rail to stare.

We dismounted for the last time. Rachid, according to the custom he had established, took the bridle of my horse.

"It is finished!" said I, in the Bedouin way.

"*Khalaṣna*, truly," he replied, "it is a melancholy thing to leave these sands."

Our caravan was to return to Jerusalem by the desert route, leaving us to take train for Cairo in the morning.

XXXVI

A BEDOUIN IN CUSTODY

I WENT to an eminence of dredgings to search the plain for the younger *khawaja*. He had come into view at last, but was riding alone, and that in a curious fashion, vacillating between haste and leisure. He would now tap the neck of his camel until the beast trotted, but having achieved this, would almost instantly persuade it back to agitated walk. I must therefore conclude that he would make haste if he could, but was unable to continue with the breath beaten out of his body by the jolting gait of his beast. Presently I observed Corporal Ali and Taufik emerge from the cover of a sand-hill; they were at a footpace, with a gesticulating Bedouin walking between the horses. To this mystery was added the appearance of a second Bedouin, who came running beyond, not with untouched strength, but falteringly, in the way of a man who had run far and eagerly. Having overtaken the horsemen, the runner took the place of the first Bedouin, who then trailed disconsolately behind, his excitement all at once departed; and in this manner the group approached over the plain.

"The man in the custody of Corporal Ali," the younger *khawaja* explained, having arrived, "is our prisoner."

"And the old man following?"

"He was seized to insure the appearance of the other."

"It is doubtless an interesting adventure to have taken a prisoner," I observed; "but, in the name of Heaven! what are we to do with a captured Bedouin?"

"Why," cried the younger *khawaja*—as though the thing were a privilege—"we shall make an example of him, of course!"

It seems that these three loiterers of our company, riding alone in the desert behind, had fallen in with the sixteen saucy Bedouins whom we had earlier encountered. Taufik was neither of the nature nor that mellowed age to accept an insult with no more than a contemptuous lift of the head. At any rate, small blame to him; these jaunty rascals had challenged the issue. When the younger *khawaja* was cursed for a Christian lout (and worse), the young dragoman slipped from his horse and felled the offender of his master. It was instantly an affray—and of the liveliest intention. The Bedouins cried, "Kill them! Kill them!" and fell upon the unarmed Taufik with this swift purpose.

They meant—in the passion of the moment—to deliver his death; here was no mere wayside brawl, but a murderous onslaught. Staves were employed

against him; the long, curved Arab knives were drawn, but driven with poor aim in the confusion, so that no mortal blow was dealt. Corporal Ali was now engaged; but the unfortunate younger *khawaja*, perched high on the hump of his frantic camel, was unable to fetch the beast to his knees, and must for the moment contain his lust to strike. When at last he abandoned the saddle at a great leap, the Bedouins were in flight, bruised by the fists of Taufik and Ali into a reviving consciousness of their indiscretion.

Taufik was a thing of shreds and bruises, beaten about the head, and bleeding from small wounds of knives; but Corporal Ali was scathless, breathing easily and not unduly disordered. He now stood composed, with his long black fingers closed about the beard of an old man, who pleaded piteously to be released. Near by was a grave patriarch, of sheikly authority over his departed tribesmen, to whom Corporal Ali, in a musical address, drawled that the old gentleman whose beard he retained would be held as a hostage for the delivery of that offender whom Taufik had first accosted.

"Now," the younger *khawaja* concluded, "by good fortune we have the man to deal with."

I lamented the laborious necessity.

"What!" cried the younger *khawaja*, "would you have this fellow go free? Why," he exclaimed, outraged, adopting the English attitude, "he attacked —*us!*"

The thing must be done, then, for the unpardonable offence of lifting a hand against the Anglo-Saxon, or the servant of the Anglo-Saxon, in an Eastern land occupied by the English; there was no evading a duty of this grave public nature, lest the journey of some other traveller be more seriously interrupted, they all wisely said.

XXXVII

DOGS OF THE ENGLISH

THE tents were now raised, the rugs spread, the *khawaja's* easy-chair set in the shade; and here on the bank of the cool-flowing canal the *khawaja* elegantly rested, the admired of Egyptians, his attention occupied with an occasional whiff from the cook's pots, with the manifold beauties of the Blue Rug, with the grace of the palm-tree opposite, and with a fragrant cup of coffee, the product of the art of Rachid, formerly employed by David's Gate. He reverted presently to the veritable catastrophe of unpalatable duty confronting him—justice upon the head of that erring Bedouin—but was interrupted by a diffident clearing of the throat in his proximity. It was the wronged Bedouin of Googaa, his son in his shadow—not the captured offender, but that ragged man who in the early morning had sought to enlist the *khawaja's* sympathy, but had been denied. He had followed all these sandy miles from the last well to renew his petition for the *khawaja's* influence in the proceeding he was about to take against the enemy who had encroached upon his land.

"Come!" thought the *khawaja;* "this ragged fellow

is of a mind too simple and timid to conceive a plot, and, moreover, having at some cost preserved an acquaintance through one whole day, he is become like an old friend. Why shall a man not introduce one gentleman to another? I will curry additional favor with the captain at El Arish by presenting him with the furred dust-glasses he coveted. Of this gift the petitioning Bedouin shall be the bearer; and if it please the captain to listen to the Bedouin's complaint (I will write), it will doubtless please the Bedouin, too, and would unquestionably delight the vanishing *khawaja* could the tale of this indulgence but come to his ears."

The Bedouin was politely grateful, assuming a letter favorable to his suit; and the sleepy attention of the *khawaja* was permitted again to engage with the palms and green water and the coffee of Rachid. I do not know the end of the story of the poor Bedouin who was sacrificed by his sheik to preserve the tribe in its ancient peace. It was an incident by chance of the caravan route, where men pass, going east and west, and the tales they live issue in conclusions beyond the ken of vanished travellers.

There presently arrived from the dust and odors and shiftless litter of Kantara an animated group. Here was the admirable Aboosh, in a saucy rage, browbeating a greasy, pop-eyed, corpulent Egyptian in a womanish red skirt, who radiated the pomposity of a native magistrate, which, indeed, he confessed

to being; and here was the beseeching offender, pattering repentance with the fervor and regularity of a Gatling gun, his aged tribesman in melancholy echo of the forlorn assault upon our sympathies.

No sooner had the Bedouin caught sight of the younger *khawaja* than he dropped prostrate, grovelled close, kissed the astounded young man's shoes, clambered up his leggings, and embraced his knees; and in this attitude of humiliation he continued a not unmusical agony of pleading until the younger *khawaja* disengaged himself and fled blushing to his tent. Thus abandoned, the Bedouin fell at the feet even of this Armenian Taufik (but with a wry face), who dodged behind Rachid, leaving the elder *khawaja* exposed to the culprit's attentions.

I could not release my shoes, though what with these caresses I toppled perilously; and I was as loath to strike as cruelly kick out. It was Corporal Ali who sticked the man to his distance, and then kept him in watchful custody, in the way of a policeman who is used to the calculating repentance of sinners. In the mean time the engagement between Aboosh and the corpulent magistrate had gone crescendo to a deafening pitch; whatever the argument, it had elicited a noisy eloquence, in the exercise of which the magistrate had near lost his breath and the dragoman had altogether lost his temper.

Two benignant travellers, having hitherto wandered unmolested and unmolestingly, we were caught at last, it seemed, in a very tempest of belligerent agitation.

"This greasy rascal of a magistrate," Aboosh informed me, "will do nothing; and we are therefore demeaned by him."

"What!" cried I, in wrath.

"They are all Mohammedans together," he explained.

I had before been of the heart of compassion; but I perceived, now, with rising indignation—such is religious partisanship—that the crime of this bloodthirsty and villanous Arab was of a nature to be severely dealt with under the law.

"What has that to do with the man's guilt?" I demanded.

"The Mohammedan feast is near, and the Bedouin is in haste to celebrate it with his tribe," Aboosh answered; "the magistrate will not imprison him for as much as three days, lest he be detained beyond the time."

"I will speak with him," said I, truculently.

It chanced, however, that I had no need to persuade the Egyptian; the persuasion was inadvertently accomplished by Ali Mahmoud, the big muleteer, and that in a most curious and informing manner. Ali Mahmoud, having now arranged the camp to his satisfaction, ran up the British flag, according to his custom, and lumbered off to sit with the cook, an eye on the pot, and a broad red nose expanded to the steam of the cooking.

The effect upon the magistrate was bewildering; in a flash he had transformed himself.

"What has come over this fellow?" I asked the dragoman.

"He says," Aboosh interrupted, with a triumphant little laugh, "that at Kantara they are the dogs of the English. 'We are the dogs of the English,' he says: 'what shall we do sufficiently to punish the rascally Bedouin who has assaulted your excellency's servants and secretary?'"

"Tell him that he must himself impose the punishment," I replied; "but in the name of Heaven! first explain his acquiescence."

"Ali Mahmoud raised the flag."

"Did the man not know that we were British subjects? Surely we speak the language!"

"It is true that you speak English," Aboosh answered, significantly; "but you go clean-shaven, like the Americans."

Forthwith the dogs of the English harried the Bedouin off to jail.

XXXVIII

HELD UP

THERE was an interval of repose; and while we sat at ease in the shade of the tent, undisturbed by the curious of Kantara, who were kept off by a patrol in the person of Rachid, Aboosh gravely reflected, apparently occupied with a problem of no small importance. It seemed he could not determine whether to bathe and array himself for the glittering promenades of Cairo at that moment or await another time of leisure; but eventually concluding to have the solemn business over with, he departed, grave as befitted the approaching ceremony. I heard a great splashing, calls for the assistance of Rachid, admiring exclamations, an altercation, and a gentle debate; then roundabout passed Elias, the cook's boy, crying, "*Khawaja* Aboosh! *Khawaja* Aboosh!" And the admirable dragoman responded, clad resplendently below a suspicious slender waist, but not ready for inspection above, one strand of his mustache in a curl-paper and the other hanging damp and limp.

There was a glint of official braid about the visitor

whom he received; and I observed that Elias set stools and a table near by, and fetched coffee, and that Aboosh and the stranger got their heads together and laughed a great deal, and in all seemed to have an excellent time. But I was presently enlightened. Aboosh came to me woebegone, his brows drawn with trouble, his hand pulling in an agitated way at the unoccupied strand of his mustache. "You know," said he, "that one of our horses is worn and has for three days carried no burden? Well," he continued, "this man is a quarantine officer, and the thing has been reported to him. The horse is in good health, as I know, having observed him carefully; but this man says that he has a running at the nose and will communicate a plague to all the horses and camels of Egypt if he is permitted to return over the desert to Jerusalem to-morrow, as I had planned!"

"His greed is the doctor," said I.

"Truly," cried Aboosh, distressed to the point of tears; "but he has me at his mercy. I must either waste the profits of this long journey in maintaining my animals and men in a quarantine of three weeks at Kantara or hand the last piastre of them to this greedy official."

"I would not pay one penny!" said I.

"That is not the way," he replied; "the man is entitled to some small bribe from every traveller who can afford to pay. I do not wish to be ungenerous; but he seems like a hard man, and I think he

will demand more than his right when he comes again, even every piastre of my profits."

"Has he named no sum?" I asked.

"No," the dragoman sighed; "he has not yet formed an estimate of the amount of my profits."

"What shall you do to protect your pocket?" said I.

"I will be clever in conversation," was the answer.

Here, indeed, was a pity. Aboosh had labored diligently in our service, and was a man of many obligations, generously assumed.

It occurred to me late in the afternoon that the captured Bedouin might even then be on trial; and I dispatched Aboosh in haste to the village (two curl-papers now engaging his mustache) to make sure that he was not punished with undue severity by these solicitous dogs of the English. The obsequious magistrate had relieved me of attendance, and my servants; nor, said he, would he put me to the fatigue and disturbance of providing witnesses, but would himself close the incident with neatness and dispatch. It was a happy thing, therefore, that Aboosh was present with a gift of mercy; for when the dragoman arrived the zealous judge was on the very point of condemning the forsaken unfortunate to a year's servitude in the prison at Port Said.

"You remember Mirza, the sheik of the Tribe of Them That Had Heard?" the dragoman asked me,

having returned to the lengthened shadow of my tent. "You remember that with the elders of his tribe he drank coffee with you in your encampment at the Well of Mazaar. You remember that you rode through the salt-swamp and ate dates and drank coffee with him and his elders in his tent? You remember that you were served with one cup—with two cups—with the third cup? You have not forgotten the meaning of the third cup—that it signifies not only the friendship of the sheik, for mutual defence and offence, but the loyal devotion of his tribe? You remember that, departing, you indulged Sheik Mirza with a gift, and that he received it, vowing his devotion and the loyalty of his tribesmen to endure forever? Well," the dragoman concluded, with a knowing little wink and grin, "these offending Bedouins, of whom this man was the chief, are of the Tribe of Them That Had Heard, returning from Cairo."

"What punishment was inflicted?" I asked.

"When I informed the man of these exchanges of hospitality," Aboosh replied, "he hung his head and wept, crying out that he had shamed his tribe; and in pity I persuaded the magistrate to reduce the sentence to one week in the jail at Kantara."

The poor Bedouin had engaged my sympathies.

Night came, after a flaring sunset—of those great clouds, flung mightily forth and wide-lying in the west, terrible with heaviness and silence and lurid

colors. It was presently dark; and here, again, all roundabout, was the same dear mystery of stars. Rachid called us to the fire, which crackled its own invitation to the warmth and shifting red light in a voice of persuasive cheerfulness; and we sat down in the sand, as we had these many nights, in the company of all those who travelled with us and of whatsoever wanderers would be entertained at our table. Rachid crooned a love-song, to which we listened, stirred but uncomprehending, and thereafter recited with relish a composition which set forth the heroism of the younger *khaaaja* in the bloody engagement of that day (who had been no hero at all); and Mustafa, that entertaining camel-driver, related his last informing story; and Corporal Ali, the Soudanese, now first disclosed his princely descent, as to a circle of eternal friends, adding a diverting explanation of his situation of servitude with the English; and the younger *khaaaja* indulgently performed tricks of magic, to the delight of little Ahmed, the camel-boy; and big Ali Mahmoud told laughable tales which Aboosh would not repeat, though they convulsed the whole company. These delights of evening recurred as when we travelled the remoter sands and there was no lapping water, no red and green lights drifting by, no morning prospect of farewell and haste and noise, no neighborhood of dwellings, but only the vacant desert, lying infinitely roundabout under the stars.

Aboosh was withdrawn from our company by the

A FAT LAMB IN THE SAND ARE NO THE FIRE

advent of the quarantine officer; presently he rejoined us unmoved.

"Well?" I inquired.

"I have made a mistake," he whispered, humbly. "The man is a gentleman—two napoleons were sufficient to appease him."

XXXIX

RACHID GOES HOME

WE were early astir in the morning—abroad in the cold air long before dawn—to oblige the gentlemanly quarantine officer, who had provided, when the dragoman's gold touched his palm, that the beasts which he had mistakenly suspected of affliction must nevertheless be outward bound toward the eastern desert before the break of day. When the caravan was ready to depart on the return journey to Jerusalem, Aboosh took Ali Mahmoud aside, to ease his own heart of an oppression which had long troubled him: it being a perilous thing, said he, for Christians to be outnumbered by Mohammedans on the desert road, or Mohammedans to be outnumbered by Christians.

"You are all Mohammedans but the cook and Elias," he entreated the big muleteer, "and I charge you to see that no harm befalls them—neither hunger nor thirst nor ill treatment," and Ali Mahmoud made the threefold Mohammedan oath to protect the shivering Christians in the event of catastrophe.

They went one by one—a gloomy, staggering cara-

van—over the hills to the shadows of the plain, and were there enfolded from our view; but Elias, the cook's boy, lingered to strap the third saddle-bag upon the gray stallion I had ridden, though I had warned him that the beast would carry no burden save his rider. He was a youth over-confident, and presently in hard case, for he was instantly thrown; but he mounted again, with a laugh, and was once more toppled over the horse's head. Aboosh called to Ali Mahmoud, who came back in a rage with the folly of Elias; and the two went away together, in melancholy fashion. The last glimpse we had of our engaging followers revealed a boy from Jerusalem afoot and crying heartily.

We said good-bye to Corporal Ali last of all—this when the sun was high, the village life astir.

"Corporal Ali," I said, impressively, "I have a grave commission, which you will perform upon our departure."

The Soudanese came to rigid attention.

"Do you, then," I enjoined, "go instantly to the magistrate and command the release of that Bedouin."

"The *khawaja*," he replied, smiling, "has learned mercy."

It is a lesson not difficult to learn.

Rachid went with us. To him, on the night before, had come two gold pieces, with which he must found the fortune he would raise in Cairo; and he was truly

overjoyed, but said, with many abject bows, that, having for three nights dreamed of his mother, he must forego the delights of the city and return to Jerusalem with the muleteers. I was not surprised, however, to find him new-minded in the morning. Under the wing of a Soudanese who had for three days followed our camp, he proceeded with us, now elated, now utterly cast down and weeping. That evening, in Cairo, he appeared at the hotel door—with fresh-shaven head and young beard, but otherwise deplorably ragged—to give us a friendly greeting; he would never again see Jerusalem, said he, since the delights of Egypt were so many and so delicious. From time to time in the days that followed he accosted us on the street, or waited patiently for our coming; and we observed that upon each occasion he was less agreeable to the eye. Eventually (as we learned), having parted with his gold pieces in the pursuit of happiness, he bethought himself, on the eve of the Feast of Ramadan, of an expedient, and with his last five piastres procured a scribe to fashion messages to us, interpreting Rachid's own words. These in hand, he presented himself, smiling ingratiatingly, and in much embarrassment awaited the response. I read: "I am Rachid, your poor servant, come with you from Jerusalem. I beg the graces from you for to buy new clothes for the feast. Good feast!"

I hesitated.

"Tell the *khawaja*," Rachid whispered to Aboosh,

with tears, "that I have no need of finery, but wish only to go home to my city."

It blew high next night: I pitied Rachid, bound across the sea from Port Said to Jaffa, but I was glad that he had gone home.

THE END.

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